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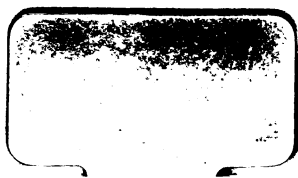
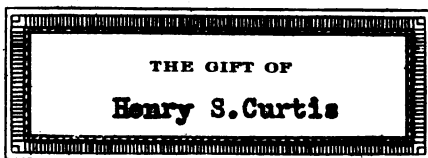
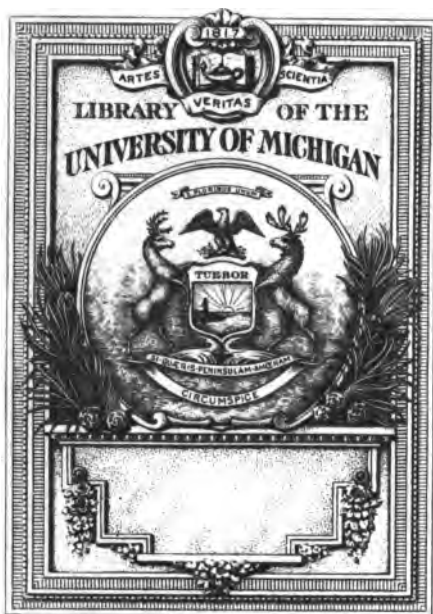
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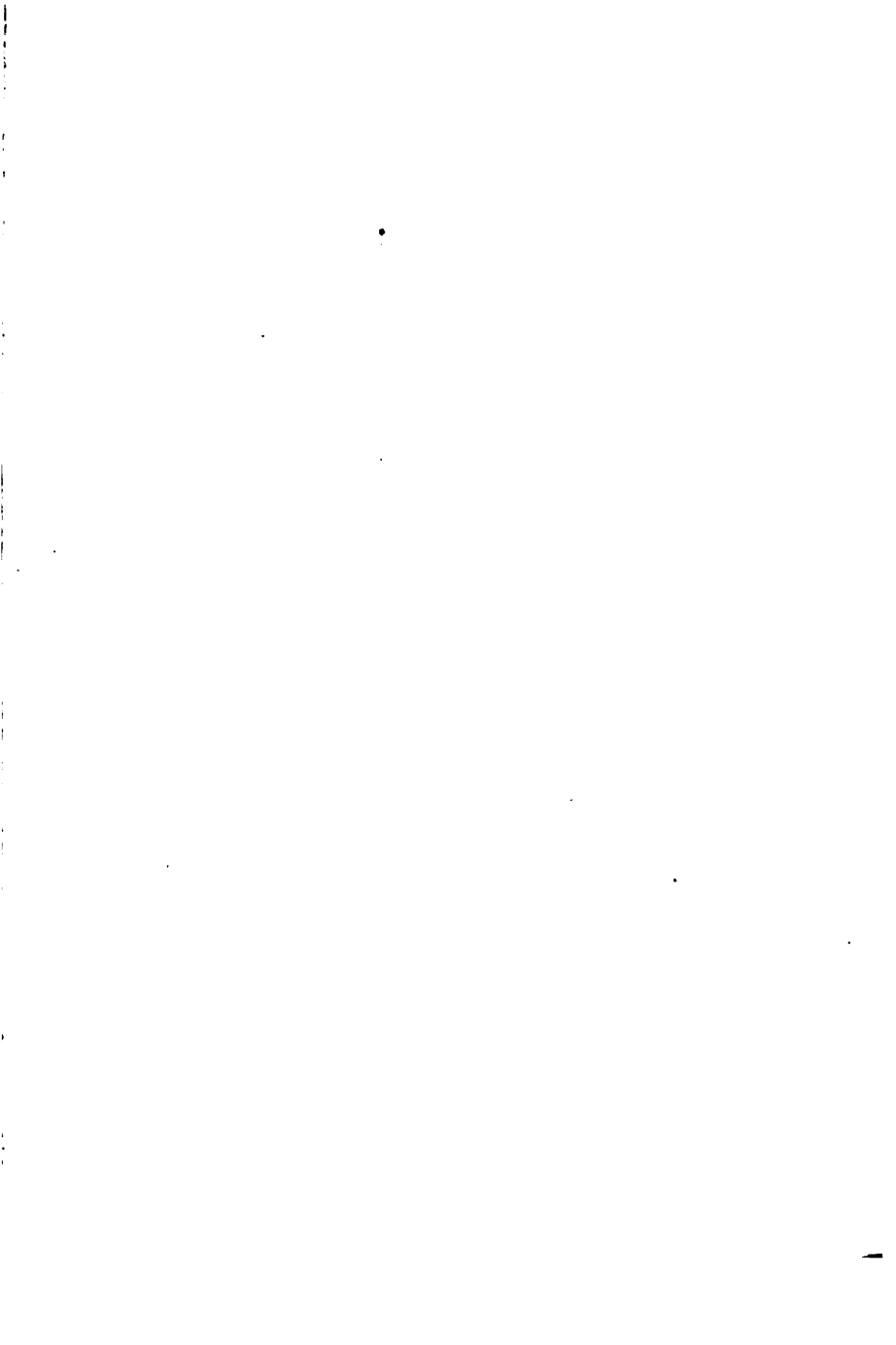
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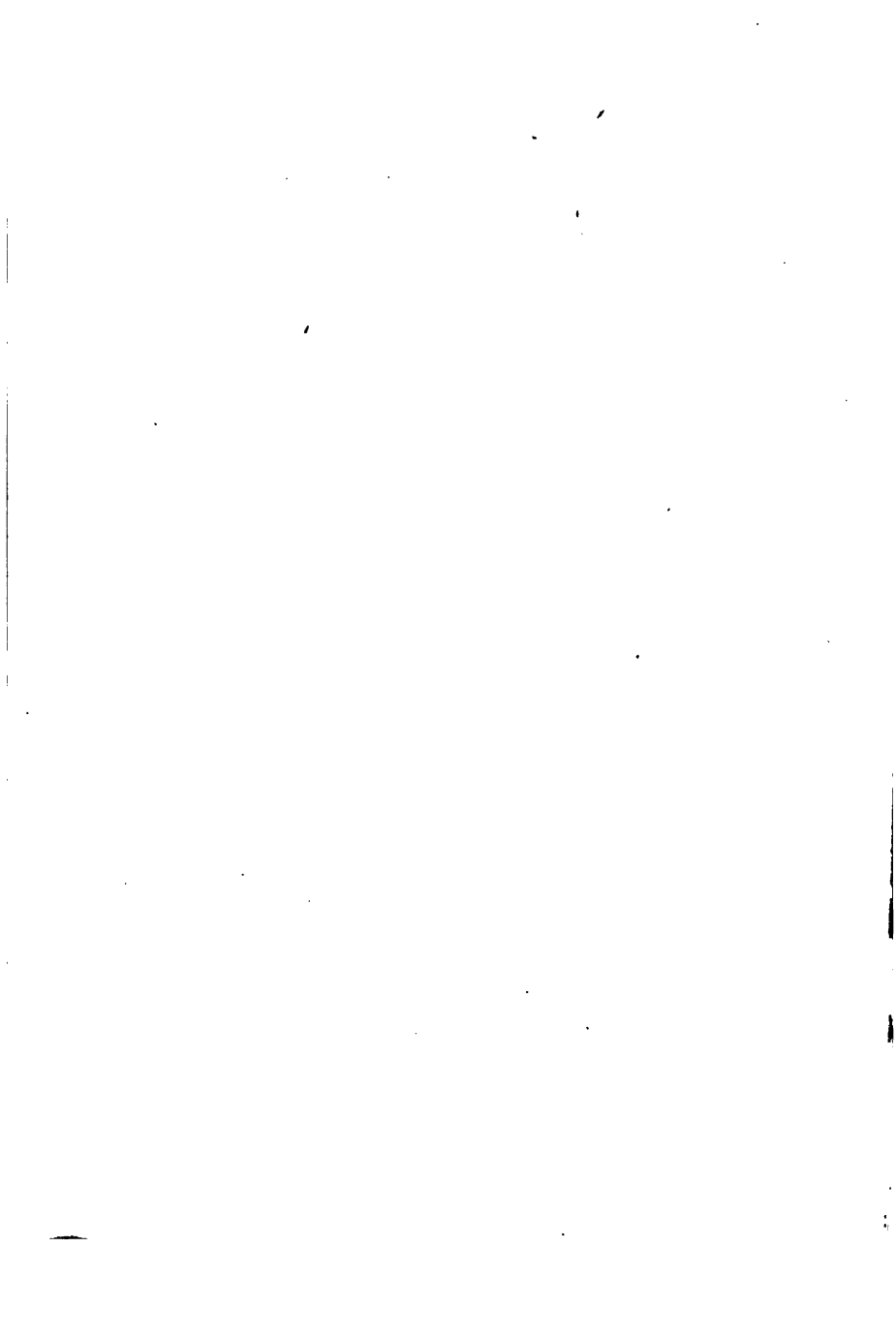


H. S. Curtis

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THE REDFIELDS SUCCESSION

A NOVEL

BY
HENRY BURNHAM BOONE
& KENNETH BROWN

Authors of "Eastover Court House"



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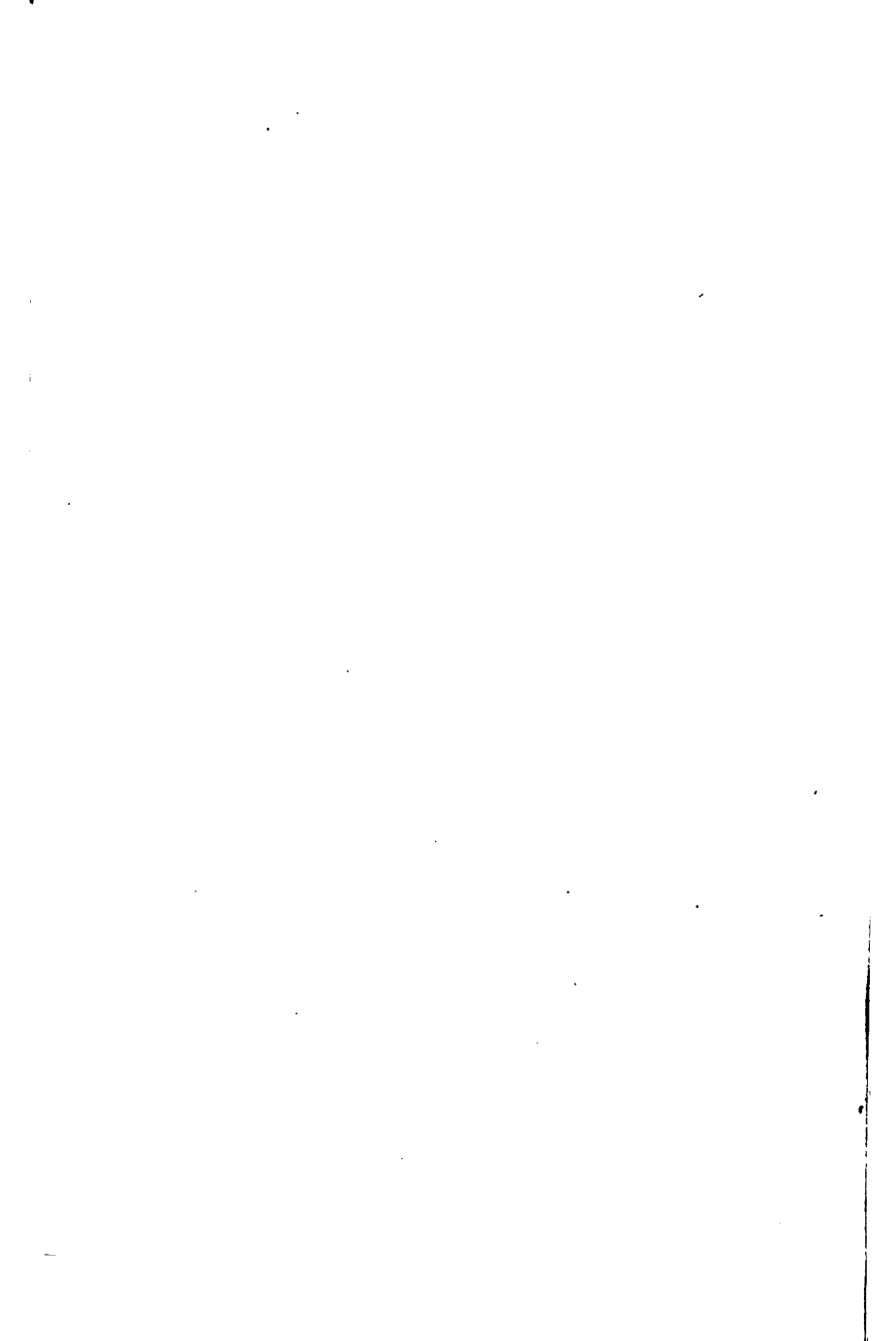
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TO
C. M. B. AND F. B. B.
THE REIN AND THE SPUR



THE
REDFIELDS SUCCESSION



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I

ON the east front of Redfields house there is a wide grass terrace, edged by a brick wall, along which are old-fashioned, cumbrous urns running over with a luxuriance of simple flowers. The bright morning sun was flooding it and the old brick house that rose above it as a servant opened the shutters of a room leading out on the terrace and fastened them back. A fair-haired woman, in a white gown, with a small boy clinging to her skirts, came out, followed by a vigorous old man, who clapped his hands and cried "Shoo!" to a flock of turkeys perched in a row on the balustrade between the urns. The little boy ran from his mother's side and also clapped his hands and yelled at the turkeys with all his might.

The birds flew off awkwardly, and the child

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bounded along the balustrade, crying "Go away!" The old man watched the boy and applauded his efforts till the little fellow, quite out of breath, ran back to his mother, imitating the ungainly, flapping birds, and laughing merrily.

"Well done, Alabama!" cried the old man.

"You musn't call me Alabamma!" the child said, petulantly.

"Why does he call you that?" Mrs. Taylor asked, laughing.

"Because I was born there. He knows I'm just as 'shamed of it as I can be."

"But why are you ashamed of it, Archie? I was born there, and I'm not ashamed of it."

"Yes; but you're a woman, and it doesn't matter. No great man was ever born in Alabamma. When I was down at Eastover Court House, two gentlemen were talkin', an' I said to them, 'I wasn't bawn in F'ginia; I was bawn in Alabamma—but my father he was a F'ginian.'"

"You did? Well! well! Here's a penny to pay you for shooing the turkeys—and to comfort you for having been born in 'Alabamma.'"

The child, with a glance at his mother's face, which was met by a reassuring nod, came forward and took the penny. "T'ank you, suh," he said, with childish dignity.

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"That's right," said the old gentleman. "Never forget your manners." Then he turned to Bessie: "What a warm morning for October. I hate to go North to a stuffy old city, even for a few weeks."

"Why do you go now? Why not put it off until I go up to New York this winter, so we can travel together?"

"Don't tempt me." He smiled down into her face, and put his hand on her shoulder. "You don't know how much you have been to me, Bess. Without you, in this big house, I might have turned barbarian. But I have some things to do, and I must do them. To-morrow never comes, Bessie. I am an old man, and must do what I have to do while yet there is time."

"Don't think of—of anything," Mrs. Taylor said, with the dread many persons feel of mentioning any calamity lest it come to pass. "It is I who owe everything to you."

"Not a bit of it! I couldn't enjoy myself all alone here, and I certainly couldn't eat up all the meat I make every year. Redfields never was intended to be without a mistress. And it never shall be!" he cried, with determination. I am going to make sure you shall stay here when I'm gone. Mighty barny this old house looked when I was here alone. I pretty nearly used

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to go out and sit with the mules for company. But there's Uncle Billy with the buggy, and I must make a trip to the Race Track Bottom, where they're pulling off corn. Get your sun-bonnet, Bess, and come with me."

Mrs. Taylor went into the house and presently reappeared tying the bonnet on her blonde head, and together they walked across the old sod of the lawn, under the big oaks, which had always been there, even in the days before Redfields house had been built, to the gate in the hedge. The child was there before them, perched upon the shoulders of the negro holding the horse.

"All right, Billy," said the old man, taking the reins. "Put that young rascal in here. I wonder where the dogs are. I couldn't think of going without all the family this morning. Whistle, Archie."

The child puckered up his mouth and tried to do 'as he was told.

"I'm afraid they can't hear you, son," the old man said, and leaned out of the buggy and called. Two collie dogs came bounding from the back of the house. "Family complete," he said, cheerfully. "Get up, mare!"

They drove down the shady plantation lane by the blue-grass fields, dotted with cattle and sheep, until they came to a low cottage with a

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wide porch. General Gault pulled up. "May we pass through your demesne, Mrs. Taylor?" he asked. "All right; Archie, get out and open the gate."

The house was unoccupied, but the lawn was tidy, and some flowers were blooming along the porch. It was a picturesque little place, the low roof extending in front of the house over the porch, and two rock chimneys standing out at the ends.

"Doesn't it seem tiny after the big house?" the old man said.

"Didn't the big house seem tremendous after this?" Mrs. Taylor answered. "Do you know, I shouldn't mind living here again."

"Nonsense!" he cried. "If I hear such treason as that I shall burn it down."

"I was happy here, when I came as a bride," she went on, slowly. "Afterwards I was wretched enough, I know; but if one has been really happy in a place one forgets the other things after a while. I sometimes think that if I had been different Archie might have—"

"No, little girl; neither you nor I nor any earthly power could have changed Archie. He was what his inheritance made him. I forgave him over and over again, for my wife's sake; but he was what his father and grand-

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father were before him. I knew them both well.

"Don't say that; think of his son."

General Gault tightened his lips. The child sat at their feet, gazing about him with a pair of serious, brown eyes, like his mother's. His fair hair was like hers, too; and the expression of his mouth suggested a gentleness and yet a determination which were at the bottom of her character.

"We must hope—and pray, Bessie," the old man said. "Archie was my wife's son, but he had none of her character. He"—nodding towards the boy—"is like you. I pray Heaven it may be deeper than likeness."

They drove on in silence through Mrs. Taylor's farm, and came out into a large flat, where many negroes were tearing the shocks of corn to pieces for the ears, and then binding the fodder up again into bundles for easier handling in the future.

"How's it turning out?" General Gault asked of the overseer.

"Mighty good. We got a four-horse load from eight shocks," the overseer answered. "That last shower, July stock-sale day, made it—just like I told you it would. You'll have in-about seven hundred barrels to sell, agreeable

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to my notion. That shower came down from the Blue Ridge, and never broke till it war just at the aidge of this plantation, and then it come down *good*."

There was a superstition that the sun always shone brightest on Redfields plantation, and that any local showers during a drought fell on General Gault's corn, if nowhere else.

All the faces that greeted the "boss" were familiar ones, from Uncle Manuel's to Uncle Manuel's grandson's. Most of the younger laborers had occupied the same cottage all their lives. This plantation was as much their home as it was their master's. A few had been his slaves, or were descendants of his slaves; but, after The Surrender, most of the ex-slaves changed masters. To change masters was their greatest test of freedom; it hardly seemed like freedom to stay on where they were. Now the war was a long time back, and those that remembered it vividly were a constantly decreasing number.

A man on horseback rode over the rise surrounding the flats and came towards them. General Gault recognized a neighbor, a Mr. Henry, once a lawyer, but now a farmer of enthusiasm, with leanings towards the breeding of thoroughbred horses.

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"No chinch-bug in this corn—eh, Henry?" said General Gault.

Henry delivered an ornate compliment to Mrs. Taylor before replying, with a rueful air: "I came over for the fellow-feeling that makes us wondrous kind. I should have known better. The conditions I struggle under never seem to exist with you.. The weeds got away with my crop this year. Crab-grass 'done took' the corn. Do you ever make a bad crop, general?"

"Sometimes. But then you must remember that I'm not working a farm that's been rented out ever since the war."

"I didn't use to hit it off always on my little farm down by Eastover, before I got back Chinquapin, though I did better there than I have here; but I never did have your good fortune."

General Gault got out of the buggy; Henry dismounted and drew his arm through his bridle-rein, and together they walked over the field.

"Have you made out that will for me?" General Gault asked, when they were alone.

"Yes; here it is." Henry took it from his breast-pocket.

"I'm going to New York this evening, and I want to execute it before I go."

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"You are fully decided about leaving Redfields to Archie?"

"Yes; it seems the best way to do it. I want to keep it intact, as it came to me. If Bessie should marry again there might— What do you think about it?"

"Of course he is Archie's son."

"But he is his mother's, too," the old man said, vehemently; "and he is like her—and I am fond of him."

"How about your nephew up North?"

"I wasn't on good terms with my brother for a number of years. After his death I invited Trueman down here a couple of times, but he never came. Once I looked him up at his office in New York. He was out, and I didn't hear that he returned the call, though he may have, since I came away soon afterwards. I shall leave him something; but I don't hold with many Virginians that the mere fact of his being of my blood entitles him to my property. By all the ties of affection, Bessie is my daughter, and ought to be my heir."

They walked on between the corn-shocks, General Gault mechanically speaking to the laborers, but with his mind on other things than farming.

"Four good ears on this stalk," Henry said,

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picking it up, his horse stretching the length of the reins to sample the corn for himself.

"Yes," General Gault answered, absently. "Henry, I am in the same dilemma. He is Archie's son, and I am afraid. I believe I'll change again. It shall all go to Bessie absolutely. She's the one I care for, after all. Though she's only my stepson's wife, I couldn't love her more if she were my own daughter—and I despised him. But I have forgiven him long ago; he brought me more than he cost me, much as that was. Write me a will on those lines to-day, and send it over, and I'll either sign it before I go or mail it to you from New York."

They returned to the buggy. The old horse was standing placidly, one ear bent backward as if listening to Archie, who was laughing and talking with his mother. Henry rode back with them. They separated at the gate, and as he dog-trotted gently down the road he heard for a long time, on the still morning air, the child's busy tongue, with now and then the mother's gay laugh.

A few days later Henry rode up the lawn to Redfields. All the windows of the house were wide open. Chairs and other pieces of furniture were scattered about the terrace. A pile of

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rugs lay beneath a tree near the horse-rack, and one, hanging over a wire connecting the tree and the horse-rack, was receiving a vigorous beating from two negroes. Several negro women could be seen through the windows energetically polishing the floors and wiping the wood-work, and over all presided a determined-looking white woman, with a voice contrastingly soft, Mrs. Barney, wife of the overseer.

"How do you do, ma'am?" Henry called, as politely as if he were addressing the mistress of the house. "Is Miss Bessie in, or has she fled from this important domestic ceremony?"

"No, Mistuh Henry; Miss Bessie went down to Old Point with the Ca'ingtons, yestiddy, and left me in charge here."

"I don't suppose a big envelope has come for her from the general, since she left?"

"No, sir. She told me to keep her mail, because she'd only be gone a few days, and there are only three ordinary-sized letters."

"I expect he forgot about sending it," Henry said, half to himself. "He was to have mailed me a right important document, but it hasn't come, and Mr. King swears he hasn't lost it down some crack in his post-office. I thought he might have mailed it to Miss Bessie instead."

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"Mought be he thought he'd bring it himself. I heard Miss Bessie say he expected to be back right soon, now. I'm tryin' to do a little house-cleanin' while she's away, though she keeps eve'ything so neat I can't hardly find a thing to do."

Henry rode away disappointed. At the gate a small boy on a white mule, dyed a delicate pink from the red clay, clattered by, galloping towards the house, and, just beyond, Henry met another rider, a young man, noticeably well dressed, on an excellent half-bred hunter, mettlesome, though rather thin.

"Miss Bessie in?" the new-comer called, cheerily. "I feel in need of a moral stimulus this morning."

"No; she went down to Old Point with the Carringtons yesterday."

"The deuce she did!"

"Why do you want a moral stimulus? Too many deuces last night?"

"No, too few—I only held three. I'm never repentant on a full house—except when somebody else holds four of a kind. This morning I'm being disappointed all round. Can't be either encouraged to reform or lent some money to see if my luck won't change to-night. I've just come from a trying interview with my

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sister. Maude—or rather Sister Fair—sent Harriet over a check for a trip to Richmond this fall, and I thought so much ready money had better be turned over once or twice before she set out; but she prefers—”

“Going to Richmond to seeing the money go into the pockets of Jones and Terry and the rest of the Court House gang.”

“Exactly. Now, don’t you want to become my banker? My mules will always be there as security.”

“Unless some other creditor seizes them ahead of me. No, Saint, I can’t do it. I don’t know that I would if I could, but I can’t. All my ready money is absorbed by fencing and farm tools and fertilizers. I hadn’t any idea, when I bought back Chinquapin, how much it cost to bring up a run-down farm, or I might almost have been content with my little place down at the other end of the county.”

St. Clair turned his horse and rode down the lane beside Henry. “It ’ll take you some time to bring it up to Redfields,” he said. “By-the-way, whom does this goodly inheritance go to finally? He has no near relation, has he?”

“I don’t suppose I am betraying a confi-

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dence," Henry answered, after a minute. "No; I don't believe General Gault meant to keep it a secret. It goes to Miss Bessie."

"I thought so. Well; she ought to have it. I'd be awfully sorry to see any one else in this house. But the general is good for a long time yet—and may his years be many!"

"Amen!" said Henry.

At this moment he heard his name called shrilly from the direction of the house. Looking back, he saw a little negro boy scuttling through the hedge gate.

"Mis' Barney, she say, can she see you? She say, she must!" he cried, breathlessly.

Henry turned back, followed by St. Clair, and went through the gate and up the lawn. Mrs. Barney was leaning against an urn on the terrace, crying. Several negro women with dust-cloths in their hands stood by, in lifeless stolidity. Suddenly, one of them burst into loud lamentations: "Oh, my Gawd! Oh, my Gawd!" she cried; "he daid! he daid!"

Henry and St. Clair jumped from their horses and ran up the steps. Mrs. Barney held out a telegram to Mrs. Taylor from a firm of lawyers in New York, and sobbed, her face among the flowers of the urn.

Henry passed it to St. Clair, with a shaking

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hand. He thought of General Gault's purpose and of the will that had not come.

"I wonder if he executed it," he said.

"Do you mean—" St. Clair cried, and then interrupted himself—"Who is the next of kin?"

"A nephew, in New York," Henry answered.

II

MONDAY night, before going to bed, Truman Gault, reporter on the New York *Planet*, brought out his little account-book to set down his receipts and expenses. His system was of the simplest. On the preceding Monday his cash on hand had been \$28.50—he did not take account of odd pennies. To-day he had received \$30.00. Total, \$58.50. He counted the money in his pocket: \$33.65. On the back of an envelope he made the subtraction:

$$\begin{array}{r} \$58.50 \\ \underline{33.65} \\ \$24.85 \end{array}$$

From this \$24.85, his total expenses, he further subtracted \$7, leaving \$17.85, and then on the right-hand page of his account-book, labelled *Spent*, he wrote: "Board, \$7. Etc., \$17.85." He had ruled off the book into weeks, instead of using the ordinary division of months. Nature had divided time into weeks, punctuating it, in a way not to be overlooked, with pay-days,

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and man's arbitrary division into months did not affect Trueman.

He studied over the *etc.*, \$17.85. "Too much!" he said to himself. He thought over the week to discover whether he had had any large expense: there had been no clothes, and he had not even hired a horse for a ride in the park on his last day off, having contented himself with the more economical pleasure of an afternoon's golf at Van Cortlandt.

He next examined his bank-book of the Park Avenue Savings Bank. There was enough there to give him some feeling of independence when talking to the city editor of the *Planet*, but not enough for much else. "If I had only left Brooklyn Rapid Transit alone," he murmured. Like many another, he had not been content with the long high-road of saving, but had tried to leap the barbed-wire fence of speculation. He pondered the whole financial outlook, sitting on the edge of his bed, his feet on the rounds of his chair. The wall of his room was painted a distressing yellow, a little table held a pipe, some cigarette papers, and tobacco. A shelf suspended over his bed bore what books he possessed and a pasteboard hat-box containing a silk hat. The bureau, when the drawers were shut, left sufficient room between

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it and the bed for him to walk through—he was a big man. Beyond the foot-board of the bed was space in which he could turn around, between the wash-stand, the little table, and a gas-stove. His clothes were hung up in a closet in the hall, into which it was his privilege to go in a state of considerable dishabille. He was not fortunate in his choice of a boarding-house. He had chosen it first, over on West Twenty-seventh Street, because of its extreme cheapness, when that was an absolute essential. He stayed on partly through the power of inertia, partly because he preferred to spend his money in other ways than comfort in his hours at home.

“I’ll brace the old man for a raise on Wednesday,” he said to himself, with the courage arising from the desire to escape the thrall of the hall bedroom, tempered by the knowledge that every day half a dozen men applied at the office, who would be willing to work for two-thirds his salary.

The next morning he lay in bed even later than usual—the one luxury of the morning-newspaper man; for it was his day off. While dozing in bed, he thought of a bit of dialogue for a magazine story he was working on, and reaching over to the bureau, he got a pad and

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pencil, and wrote rapidly for a half-hour, the ideas coming to him in quick succession. Like most newspaper men, his one ambition was to get into some other work, and literature seemed the only hope of escape, a hope so often deferred by inappreciative editors as to make him very heart-sick, except when, as at this time, the inspiration which comes from creation was upon him, and all past failures were forgotten.

Trueman dawdled over his breakfast, which came at the time most business men take their luncheon. The proper disposition of the long afternoon and the evening thereafter demanded thought. It was an oasis in a desert of more or less arid work, and received a consideration which might have seemed ridiculous to one living in a bosky country of leisure, or even to one all of whose evenings were free for social enjoyment. There was a time when Trueman Gault used to have no debates with himself on this subject, except to decide what pretext was most plausible for seeing Virginia Sanford. That was the time when he vexed his soul with psychological investigations to determine whether any part of her attraction for him was due to her wealth and its attributes.

The philosophy of love, as expounded in its many text-books called novels, teaches that

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externals are unessentials. There was even a time, not many years ago, when the fashionable frock was held to indicate a deceitful mind, the creases in the trousers a corrugated heart. All that, of course, is changed in the present era, when the eleventh commandment is formulated by the tailor and the dressmaker, and reads, "Thou shalt dress well, and Knox shall be the name inside thy hat!" but still we are told—perhaps because Fate still forces some authors to buy their attire cheap and ready-made—not to fall in love with the clothes but with the girl; though reason would tell us plainly that the clothes may last or be replaced by better, whereas the girl will fade.

And Trueman Gault, to whom the luxurious surroundings amid which Virginia Sanford had her being appealed powerfully, used to sit and look at her, and wonder if he would be as fond of her if she were a type-writer, lived, like himself, in a fourth-floor hall bedroom, and received him in a boarding-house parlor. The answer he gave himself was that he should not. Her cosmopolitanism—the result of wealth—appealed to him, her culture, her familiarity with the world's best paintings and architecture, with the best of current drama and literature. And all this he found it hard not to credit to mercenariness

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on his part. Trueman was not quite fair to himself in his introspection. But then there came a time when he no longer debated the subject—he simply realized that he was in love. And at that time he began to compute how many weeks of his saving would be required to buy one of her dresses. And then he stopped going to see her.

With a straightforward strength characteristic of him, Trueman put Virginia Sanford from the foremost place in his mind. He worked harder than ever, and knew, subconsciously, that he was working with the hope of getting her; but this he hardly admitted to himself, so remote did the possibility of it seem.

On this "day off" of his he decided, with the last swallow of coffee from his cup, for a ride in the park, as promising most refreshment for mind and body. He climbed to his room, put on his riding clothes, and wended his way to Durland's, with the pleasant self-consciousness that possesses city equestrians in this horseless age. A well-mannered gelding was brought out, and he started off, every rein of the four between the proper fingers, and all yielding a grateful support to him as he posted to the trot. Being a Virginian by birth, he considered that riding came to him by right of ancestry. In

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addition, he had taken a course of lessons at the riding academy, and, in truth, made no ill figure among the park riders of the metropolis.

Near the north end of the park he overtook Virginia Sanford and a riding-master from Durland's. Trueman gave a pull at his reins which made it fortunate for him that his horse had the leathery hardness of mouth that comes to horses much used by beginners. Then he gave his horse a kick with his spurs and rode alongside. He had not sought this interview. He had not even gone where there was any likelihood of meeting her. Fate had vouchsafed him this, and he recklessly accepted the gift.

"Oh!" Virginia cried, breathlessly, as she recognized him, "don't speak to me or I shall fall off. There! I knew you'd put me out." She had lost the rhythm of the trot and bumped helplessly about on the horse's back. She tugged on the reins, and the horse, throwing his nose up in protest at the hard hand of his rider, came down to a walk.

"I'm glad to see you"—she held her right hand cautiously across to him—"but it's got to be trot or talk—I can't do both. This is only my third ride on the road—I'd have asked you to come with me if you'd been to see me lately." There was a touch of reproach in her tone that

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made Gault's heart beat wildly for all its schooling. "Am I not doing grandly?"

"Bully!" Trueman exclaimed, with enthusiasm. "Have you given up golf?"

"No; I am waiting for you to catch up with me. You remember I beat you three-up the last time we played," she answered, demurely. "And father is going to carry me down to his plantation in Virginia this week to spend the winter. He's always said he was going to do it, and now the doctor has ordered him positively to stop all work for six months."

"Oh!" Trueman could not keep the disappointment out of his voice. "Then you won't be here at all this winter?"

"No; and we start in a few days." She added, in an undertone: "Are you coming to see me before I go?"

Miss Sanford's horse shied slightly at a wheelbarrow standing beside the bridle-path.

"Heavens!" she cried. "Do you suppose they'll do that in Virginia, when there's no one on each side of me to catch hold of? I'm going to ride all the time down there—I'm just crazy about it."

"Eet iss remarkable, the progress of Mees Sanford, in so queek learning," the riding-master put in. "You see what a straight seat

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she haf naturally." He appealed to Gault, with the flattering equality of one horseman addressing another.

"Oh, I don't know anything yet, but I'm going to learn," Miss Sanford said. "Now, let's trot again." A look of determination came into her face, and she leaned forward and began raising herself a few inches from the saddle by means of the reins and the stirrup, in order to induce the horse to trot.

"*Nein!*—no!—not so fast. Vait until he bumps you once or twice up," her teacher protested. "Vhen he bumps you *hinauf*, den you can bost."

The well-trained horses went off into a smooth trot at the cluck of the riding-master, and Virginia, with something of the precarious feeling of an aëronaut on his first flight, rose unsteadily to the trot. Only the German spoke, criticising and encouraging:

"It is pecause you haf been out—what you call it—athletically so much, dat you ride so well in such queekness. You haf the muscles well ge-trained. I haf nefer seen one so soon such a good trot ride."

"Oh, make him gallop!" she gasped. "I have a stitch in my side."

"*Gut!*" He chirruped to the horses. "Oh,

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you must not bump off your saddle now. It iss only in the trot. Now you must sit like bees-wax, tight ge-stuck to your horse."

Virginia Sanford was fearless, as many persons totally ignorant of horses are, and galloped at a rate that called for a protest from a mounted policeman.

They came down to a walk. "I wonder if I shall disgrace myself down there, among those Virginians," she said to Trueman. "There's one good thing, though: they haven't any mounted policemen, and I can gallop all the time. I wonder how far a horse can gallop without stop-ping?" she mused, evidently anticipating the pleasure of running her horse, in the South, to his limits.

"I don't know," Trueman answered, absently. He was thinking of her approaching departure. In spite of his determination to stay away from her, the thought of her being so far away for so long a time as she had indicated was very black. "I shall miss you," he said, in a low tone; for the riding-master was on the other side, not in-attentive.

"As much as you have the last month?" Vir-ginia asked, in quite a casual voice. There are two ways of speaking apart before a third person, and hers was the better.

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"I hope not," Trueman answered, grimly.

Virginia glanced sideways at him, and she believed what his voice implied. "Oh, well," she went on, airily, "I may run up to town once or twice—or you might get them to send you down there to write up the country—and farming—and things."

The sky had become overcast, and the air had the sad softness that sometimes comes before a storm. Gault had failed to find the refreshment of body and mind he had desired, yet he would not have missed this afternoon's meeting for anything. The thought that Virginia might have gone away without his again seeing her seemed horrible to him.

"May I come to see you this evening?" he asked as they rode into Durland's. "I may not get another chance, if you are going soon."

Virginia nodded.

He helped her on her car, and then walked over to the Ninth Avenue elevated. "It can't make it any worse now," he said to himself. "She'll be gone in a few days."

The blackness of the sky was on his heart, and the snow-flakes began to come down heavily while he was waiting for his train. Before he got off at Fourteenth Street the ground was white. As he crossed Fifth Avenue he saw two

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horses fallen on the slippery asphalt, their drivers endeavoring with blankets to give them footing enough to get up by. He dressed leisurely before dinner, to be ready to start for the journey up-town immediately afterwards. Over the dazzling whiteness of his shirt-bosom he buttoned a sack-coat, lest he seem ostentatious at the boarding-house supper-table.

He had not finished eating when a message was put into his hands from his city editor, asking him to come to the *Planet* office at once. With a malediction for the city editor, and yet with a curious feeling almost of relief that the commonplaceness of work should replace the Tantalus pleasure of seeing Virginia, he hurriedly changed his clothes again and went to Park Row. The sidewalks were already inches deep in snow as he stopped to send a telegram to Miss Sanford.

"Ha! Good man, True!" the city editor said when Gault presented himself. "Tired of loafing, eh? Well, go help Kearns handle the snow. There's a big storm all over the country, and it'll be a foot deep here by morning. He'll want you to do some of your light sketch-work, I expect. Put some snap into it—some originality."

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Considerably after midnight, Gault and Kearns went out of the *Planet* office together, the snow having been "handled" to the extent of nearly a page, with telegraphic despatches.

"Your day off, too, wasn't it?" Gault asked.

"Yes," Kearns answered, sombrely. "Next Tuesday I'm going to lock myself up in a safe and forget the combination. If this rotten sheet sends for me to come down here again on my day, I'll come with a brace of revolvers and clean out the whole office. I won't leave enough people alive to write the obits. Why doesn't Hansen" (Hansen was the proprietor) "get enough reporters to do his work, anyway? Hansen is the—"

Kearns's blood was up, and he cursed the proprietor of the *Planet*, and the proprietors of all other papers he had ever worked for, with the language a newspaper man accumulates only after long experience. He cursed them and their relatives, friends, and papers; their managing editors, city editors, and business managers. He took a fresh start and cursed the counting-room, the city department, the editorial writers, and the whole number of their readers. "The day that I get out of the newspaper business I shall keep sacred all my life as Deliverance Day. I shall celebrate Deliverance Day year after year,

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and shall teach my wife and my children and my grandchildren— Oh! damn it!" he broke off, in a disgusted tone—"there's one thing I forgot to put in my story: how the streets, to-night, are all worn into little paths, like a big country village. The crowd 'll trample 'em all out to-morrow."

III

"**T**HINK you're worth more than thirty per, do you, True?" Johnson, the city editor, said familiarly when Gault carried out his intention, next day, of asking for an increase of salary. "You must have been reading some of our editorials on the prosperity of wage-earners under the Republican administration."

"I haven't had a raise for nearly a year," Gault urged. "Last time you told me to hope for something more—"

"Always do that on principle," Johnson interrupted. "Hope deferred's the cheapest stimulus I know. Many a man's worn himself into the grave for the prospect of a five-dollar raise. Well, I'll think it over, but these cable tolls on the Chinese stuff take all the money in the concern—we've always got some good excuse," he ended, with a grin, whirling around in his chair.

Trueman went back to his table, not unduly cast down by Johnson's reception of his request.

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He had been there only a few minutes when Johnson called, "Mr. Gault!"

Gault sprang up and went to the desk.

The city editor held out a sheet of flimsy to him. "The A. P. sends in a big wreck on the Long Island, caused by the snow. I wish you'd cover it. They don't send any details. Give it what it's worth."

Gault glanced over the flimsy, got his hat from the rack, and went out. He had not eaten any breakfast before coming to the office, having risen too late, and there was no time now. He bought half a dozen bananas from a push-cart man in Park Row, and in the station at Long Island City gulped down a cup of coffee.

Seven hours later he came back to the office, pretty well fagged out, the work of writing still before him.

"Well, how'd she pan out?" Johnson asked, not taking his eyes from a long strip of proof he was looking over.

"All right," Gault answered. "Two cars smashed to pieces."

"Good. Give it a column."

"And four people killed."

"Good!" the city editor cried, looking up. "Give it two columns. Did you get all the names?"

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"All but one woman, unknown, and the initials of a man of the same name as mine."

"No relative, I hope," Johnson said, with a pretence of sympathetic interest.

"Probably not," Gault answered, cheerily. "The only relatives I've got live in Virginia."

"Then you won't fall heir to a cotton plantation or anything," Johnson said, having only a vague idea of Virginia's staple crops. "Be sure you get your stuff in for the mail edition."

Gault was so fagged out by his hard day's work that he slept late the next morning, and had to hurry straight to the office, again without any breakfast. He intended calling up Virginia Sanford on the telephone, as soon as he reached the office, and finding out what day she was going and when he could come to see her. He had hardly got inside the door, however, before Johnson called to him.

"Here, Gault! Where the devil have you been all this time? Go right down on the Bowery and cover a fire there. You'll have to handle it by yourself."

The hours passed so rapidly at the fire that Trueman had neither time to eat nor to send his message to Virginia. Late in the afternoon, when the fire was well in hand, and the reaction had begun to set in for him, he slipped away to a

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drug-store and called up Virginia on the telephone. He learned that she and her father were going away that night. It seemed all of a piece with the grayness of the day and his physical exhaustion. He explained why he had been unable to come up to bid her good-bye; but when a man is near the absolute zero of fatigue his words are few and in a monotone. He did not ask her address. In his present state of mind it seemed better it should all end. Had he been in his usual spirits, he would hardly have been able to resist the temptation of writing to her.

Pay-day came around again, and with a disappointed feeling Gault drew from his envelope the same amount he had drawn the week before. He knew that he should not find any more, without intimation from Mr. Johnson; yet there are traditions in newspaper life of finding extra sums in one's envelope for meritorious performances, and Gault had been complimented by no less a person than the managing editor on his story of the wreck.

A week passed before Gault screwed up his courage for another interview with Mr. Johnson on the salary question. He came early to the office, although he knew he should not be able to speak about it until later in the day. On his

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desk lay a long envelope with the name of Weed & Funkhauser in the corner. He opened it with the freedom from apprehension of him who has little to lose. He glanced over it, then read it slowly, hardly believing that he was not dreaming or the victim of a hoax. It said, in the guarded language of the lawyer, that Weed & Funkhauser, acting for W. D. Henry, of Chinquapin Plantation, Cartersbrook P. O., Eastover County, Virginia, had to inform him that by the death, in the recent Long Island Railroad accident, of General Theodore H. Gault, of Leicester County, Virginia, intestate, certain real property, situate in various counties in the State of Virginia, and personal property of various description, passed by his decease to the heir at law. They were advised, they said, that the deceased had no living relatives except him, the son of an only brother, now deceased; and they were of the opinion that, no will being found, the properties of the deceased General Gault passed by law to him. They added that they should be pleased to act as his attorneys in this matter, and congratulated him upon his good fortune.

Trueman walked over to the city editor. "I don't suppose you are going to give me that raise, are you, Mr. Johnson?" he asked.

"No, by thunder!" the city editor answered,

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roughly, having just seen two beats in a rival. "If I were going to make any change, it would be the other way."

"All right; then you don't keep me," Gault answered. He had been on the point of confiding his good fortune to the city editor, with whom he was on very friendly terms at odd times. His reception prompted him to exercise his new independence. He turned his back on Johnson, picked up the lawyer's letter, put on his hat and coat, and walked out of the office.

The city editor looked after him for three seconds. "Well, I'll be damned!" he said, and turned back to his assignment-book.

Outside the door Gault halted. He had passed the last outpost, the small boy whose duty it was to take in the names and errands of visitors, and who combined small-boy impudence and official importance in a wonderful degree. "Deliverance Day" had come. He thought of Virginia Sanford. She had gone to the State after which she was named, and her address was unknown to him, yet she was miles nearer than she had been the week before when they had gone riding together.

The world lay before Gault. Two things were for immediate doing—to get Virginia's address and to see his uncle's lawyers.

IV

TRUEMAN GAULT, though born in Virginia, had no recollection of his native State. His father used to speak of it with the pride which most Virginians feel for Virginia, although, like many of them, he found making a living, and hence life, easier in another State. Trueman's mother had been a New-Yorker. He knew that his father had an older brother living on the ancestral plantation; and he had had two invitations, after his father's death, to visit Redfields, invitations which the necessity of scratching for a living had rendered him unable to accept. The exact extent of the property, and that his uncle had considerable money besides, he only learned from further communications of Messrs. Weed & Funkhauser.

He went south immediately. Virginia Sanford's address, obtained from the caretaker at her house, proved to be the same as that of his uncle's Virginia lawyer, Henry; and Trueman surmised that her father's plantation and his own new-found inheritance could not be far apart.

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New York was still covered with snow—such parts of it, at least, as the Street-cleaning Department had not been over with wagon and shovel—when Trueman went away on the midnight train from Jersey City. Winter had set in with the big storm.

When he awoke in the Pullman, next morning, the snow had almost disappeared. He began to see horses and mules under the saddle, evidently used for ordinary means of locomotion, not with riding as an end, as in Central Park. The saddles were generally deeper than those he knew; and if their horses were not "gaited," the riders sat the trot instead of posting. As the train pulled out of Washington, a negro, riding bareback, ran his horse beside the train, and Gault watched him eagerly. Henceforth this was to be his life, the equestrian, outdoor life of the South. A little later, small negro cabins began whizzing past the car-windows; for the slow-going, country negro finds no small solace in settling where he can see the swiftly passing trains. The air by afternoon had become so mild that Gault stood on the rear platform of the train without need of his overcoat. The snow only lay in specks on steep northern slopes.

When Trueman was not looking at the sce-

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nery he was studying Henderson's *How the Farm Pays*, not knowing the sphinxlike character of that question, and imagining that the answer lay in print. In his suit-case lay *The New Celery Culture* and other little books, the contents of which he had already absorbed.

As he got on the local train at Richmond to go up the James River it was already darkening, the approach of storm-clouds hastening the end of the short winter's day. Soon the rain fell, spoiling the transparency of the window-panes, and driving him back on Henderson and his primer. Gault had always had leanings towards the country, though they had hitherto had to be satisfied with the country one finds in books, where perhaps it has fewer drawbacks than in real life. He tingled with pleasure at the thought of beginning his rural living under auspices that could not help being pleasanter than the ordinary. Already he had his theories as to farming. A dozen copies of agricultural papers reinforced Henderson and the other books, and from them he had learned how very wrongly most farmers farm, and how simple it is to succeed, if one only follows the advice of the editors.

It was late when the conductor called, "Cartersbrook!" and Trueman stepped out into the

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dripping blackness. A negro, with a lantern illuminating his shiny oilskins flapping in the wind, stepped up to him from the shelter of the box of a station.

"Mr. Gault, sah? Yas 'r. Glad to see you, sah. This way yo' ca'idge. Wait a minute till I get yo' trunk, sah."

His carriage! His horses, too. He almost felt as if it were his slave. He settled back in the old-fashioned rockaway and lighted a cigar. The light of the match discovered a yellow shell hairpin on the seat. "A blonde cousin, perhaps," he murmured. The trunk thumped up in front, Uncle Billy gathered up the reins, and Gault felt himself lurching along a rough road and splashing through pools of water, now at a trot and now at a walk. The lantern, fastened to the dash-board, showed up plainly the horses' steaming backs, and little else, to Gault's unaccustomed eyes. The wind was stronger than he had realized on the train, and before they had gone a quarter of a mile a gust blew out the lantern. The driver placidly continued his exhortations to his fat horses to "Come up!" without a move to re-light it.

"Hadn't you better light the lantern?" Gault called through the glass, tapping on it.

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"Naw, suh. Wind blowin' too hard," the man answered, respectfully.

"It seems very dark."

"Yas, suh," Uncle Billy assented, politely.

"How far are we from home?"

"In-about three mile."

"Hadn't we better go to a hotel or tavern, somewhere, for the night?"

"Sah?"

Trueman repeated his question.

"There's a bo'din'-house down at River Fork, what keeps open in the summer," Uncle Billy answered, doubtfully.

"How far is that?"

"In-about five mile."

"Go ahead!" Trueman commanded, leaning back in his seat.

After a quarter of an hour, during which he became convinced that he was driving over ploughed fields, not knowing how much darkness magnifies a road's roughness, he spoke again.

"Do you know where we are?"

"Yas 'r."

"Where are we?"

"We's at that ol' black-gum near Mr. Jim Ca'ington's upper hay-barn."

"Are there no lights anywhere on the road?"

"Naw, s'r."

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"Sure you know the road?"

"I come this way 'bout a hour ago."

This time Trueman fancied he detected primitive sarcasm in the negro's reply. After what seemed to him a long time the carriage stopped and the darky pushed down the glass.

"Will you please, sah, hol' the reins. I want to 'zamine the branch."

Trueman wondered if a tree had fallen across the road, as the negro was swallowed up ahead in the night. The horses stood dejected, steaming, apparently willing to stand still the rest of the night. The sougning of the wind and the dripping of the rain were the only sounds. Minutes passed. They seemed like hours. Suppose Uncle Billy had deserted him. He might as well be in Central Africa for all he could help himself till morning. All manner of suppositions crowded into his brain. The editorials of his paper about the lawlessness of the South came back to his mind vividly. He had never thought of the personal aspect of the question before. To be sure, it was always lawlessness of Southern white Democrats against Republican negroes that his paper had harped on; but in this situation there seemed to him to be no reason why lawlessness should stop at that. In his pocket was most of the money that had formerly

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lain to his credit in the Park Avenue Savings Bank. What more natural than that the neighborhood should suspect that he, coming down from New York to a rich inheritance, should be worth robbing at the least, or even murdering?

He was speculating on these possibilities when Uncle Billy's voice came to him from the nearby gloom: "Branch done riz too high fur us to cross to-night. I was afeard it would when I come down for you."

"H'm!" Gault grunted. The situation did not seem, from what he had been able to discover, full of possibilities.

"Little Bird mighty swif' riser. Man drowned here last summer, comin' home from chu'ch. Scasely enough water for his horse to drink when he went—drownded him when he come back. It was in the big drought, an' they was all prayin' for rain, an' blamin' the Lord 'cause He bu'nin' up the crops, stead of bowin' they heads in suducation. But it was mighty lucky he went to chu'ch and prepare his soul for everlastin' life, so's he wasn't called unprepared," Uncle Billy ended, piously.

"Mighty *unlucky* he went to church, I should say," Gault muttered, with city cynicism.

"What are we going to do now?"

"Mr. Hugh Ca'ington, he live up here at Hill

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Acres, sence he ma'id Miss Nannie Tazewell," Uncle Billy suggested. "'Tain't so ve'y fur. Mr. Jim live a piece back, at Cartersbrook; but Little Bird run th'ough his place."

"Who's Little Bird?"

"Why, this yere branch. You mought cross it," he went on, doubtfully, "ef you was to unhitch these hawses and ride 'em over. But you'd be mighty ap' to get your laigs wet, even ef you wasn't swep' away."

"Let's try Hugh. I have no special predilection for Jim."

"No, sah; in co'se you hasn't. Bring you to Mr. Hugh in a little time, sah! His gate's the second one on the right."

"All right." Gault lay back and lighted another cigar, strong doubts in his mind of finding any gates on such a night, let alone a gate leading to a house.

The carriage turned around in the road with a lurch; there was another stop after a few minutes for the opening of a gate, and they were climbing what seemed to be a rocky hill. It was so much rougher than anything that had gone before that Gault again rapped on the window and asked if Uncle Billy was sure they were in the road.

"No, suh, we's in the fiel'," the negro replied.

The tone was so matter of fact that Trueman

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ventured no remonstrance, although he felt convinced that the road was the place to drive in. The team stopped near the lights of a house, and the driver again was swallowed up in the darkness. After a few minutes the door of the house opened, and a lantern came down the path. Trueman heard Uncle Billy's voice saying, "The branch is up, and Mr. Gault he inside."

"This is really taking a great liberty, for a stranger like me," Gault said, fumbling with the handle of the carriage-door, "but apparently there is no hotel or inn within driving distance."

"What should we want a hotel for, Mr. Gault?" Carrington answered, hospitably. "Plenty of houses all around, if you only know where to look for them—and you can trust Uncle Billy for that. We're fortunate in having the first glimpse of you. Of course, we've all heard about you. I wish we hadn't welcomed you with such a bad night, first start off, though we have to thank the swollen creek for two other guests to-night. And they are friends of yours—we were just speaking of you. Colonel Sanford and Miss Virginia are here."

Trueman sprang out into the dripping night with a joyous laugh. He was hardly surprised; happiness was his right. Even the elements conspired for him in these days of his prosperity.

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"Isn't this luck?" Virginia Sanford cried, holding out both hands to him as he entered. "Who would have imagined we should meet again so soon—and in Virginia?"

She was no more cordial than his host's wife, "Miss Nan," as Carrington called her, with the odd formality so often found in Virginia. The room into which he had been brought to meet his old friends and new was so large that an old-fashioned square piano in one corner was almost lost in it. A fire was roaring in the fireplace, and fresh logs were continually being added with the greatest prodigality. Yet, in spite of this, the big room, away from the fire, seemed cold to Trueman, accustomed to the even temperature of furnace and steam heated houses. He stood in front of the fire, warming himself, and presently smelled the odor of burning cloth.

"I expect you're standing too near the fire," Carrington said, politely. Trueman jumped away, and found that it was, indeed, his trousers that had been burning. One leg had a hole scorched through, just above the ankle.

"Oh, Mr. Gault, how too bad!" Mrs. Carrington laughed; "coming down South and burning to death."

Trueman laughed, too, with the comforting feeling that one pair of trousers, more or less, .

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was now a matter of small moment to him. "These will do for farming, even if they have a hole or two," he said.

"Are you as much interested in farming as Colonel Sanford?" Carrington asked.

"Of course I am; but I don't know much. I expect to sit at the feet of my neighbors and learn."

"We are fellow-farmers of zeal and inexperience," the colonel put in.

It was delicious to Trueman to be claimed as an equal, thus, by the man who a week ago had been so far above him in all worldly things.

"I've been reading up on farming all the way down here," Trueman went on, enthusiastically, "and can talk you phosphoric acid and nitrogen and cow-peas and subsoil ploughing till I'm black in the face. I suppose Henderson is about the best writer, isn't he?"

"Who is Henderson?" Carrington asked.

"Why, you know his *How the Farm Pays*, don't you?"

"No. I expect you'll find me right ignorant, compared to your scientific farmers up North, who milk their cows by electricity and all that."

"Farming seems to be kind of a gold-mine, from what some of the books say about 'intensive farming,'" Trueman went on. "They raise cel-

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ery at the rate of ten thousand dollars an acre, or something like that."

"Are you going to put the whole two thousand acres of Redfields into celery?" Carrington asked, seriously.

Trueman laughed out of pure light-heartedness. "Looks like a con. game, doesn't it?" he assented. "You try it first. I'll lend you the pamphlet that tells you how."

"Thanks, I'd like to read it; but the county's a little scary since the grape boom. Fortunately the land boom never struck this section, so you won't find streets and city lots pegged out through your plantation; but the grape boom hit some of us pretty hard. I don't remember what the figures were, for I wasn't in it myself; but they were kin to your celery figures, and certain of my neighbors are struggling along under them yet."

There was no chance for a private word with Virginia Sanford during the evening; but he sat near her, and could look at her as often as he wished, and her smile answered his.

As Trueman Gault, in his big, high-posted bed that night, luxuriously lay between half-consciousness and sleep he felt at peace with the world.

V

THE lawn of Redfields cottage, with its border of chrysanthemums, showed evidences of occupancy as Henry rode up the lane and tied his horse to the fence. A child's wagon, loaded with small stones, was in his path; a big willow chair on the porch swung gently on its rockers in the warm November breeze; the hall was open through the house, and a woman's cape hung from a hook near the front door.

Henry walked up on the porch and took a step into the hall. He saw, through the right-hand door, a little colored girl, in a checked apron, dusting in the parlor.

"Mawnin', Mistuh Henry," she said, shyly.

"*Good-morning,*" he answered, and looked about him. "Wonderful the way women fix up," he said to himself. "I've been in Chin-quapin six months or more, and it looks as home-like as a respectable jail. Miss Bessie in?" he asked.

"Yas 'r—no s'r—leastways she's out catchin' Fauquier," the little checked apron answered.

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"What's your name?" Henry asked.

"My name 'Lizabeth Othello Baker," she replied, glibly. "They calls me 'Thello now, 'cause they used to call me Bessie, an' Miss Bessie, she say we-all get mixed lessen they call me 'Thello."

"I should stick for my full name, Elizabeth Othello. These are mighty mixin' days, anyway, and you might as well stand on your rights. Who named you?"

"My ma she say Mistuh Saint done name me 'Thello. She say she reckon he name me one o' they times when he been frolickin', cause she ain' never heerd no such name befoh. Mr. Saint he say "'Thello' tho'oughb'ed Af'can name, an' my ma she name me 'Lizabeth, too, cause she say she might fo'git 'Thello, an', 'sides, she ain' gwine have no child o' hearn name with a onliest Af'can name."

Henry went through the house and out into the blue-grass field in which the stable was. At the other end of the yard he saw Mrs. Taylor, one hand holding out an ear of corn coaxingly to her horse, whom she had cornered, while her other hand stole warily towards his mane. When almost in reach, she sprang forward and managed to get a firm grip on it. He snorted and half reared, and nearly swung her from

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her feet; but she clung to him, and in a second he had quieted down.

"Bravo!" cried Henry. "I shouldn't have liked to take that chance in a fence corner. You'd mighty likely got kicked if he had got loose."

"Yes; but I have been chasing him for half an hour. Fauquier is the best horse and the most exasperating one I know."

"He's a good horse," Henry assented. "But he hasn't Warwick's rack. When you want to make time, there's nothing like a rack."

"I'd rather gallop when I want to go fast."

"Y-e-s," Henry assented, doubtfully. "When you come to my age, though, you'll prefer a sedater gait."

Mrs. Taylor laughed. "Well, at 'your age' you don't seem to mind riding after a fox forty miles on occasion. Do you remember, last winter, the time you-all started below Eastover and lost the fox in the Dripping Spring field, and spent the night at Redfields, and—"

Mrs. Taylor stopped, a catch in her voice. Little things like this were always bringing up the memory of General Gault to her. "Oh, Mr. Henry, he was so much alive, wasn't he? I can't realize now that he won't come riding up the lane any time and order me to go back

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to the big house with him. We were joking about my coming back to Redfields cottage the day he went away—you remember, when we met you in the Race Track bottom?"

"Yes," Henry said, soberly. "And to think now that a stranger and an interloper—"

"We mustn't call him that," she interrupted. "He doesn't know he is."

"But when the general wanted you to have it all—"

"That is the main thing, after all: knowing that he meant to give it to me."

The color which the exertion of catching her horse had given her had faded away. Henry tied Fauquier to the fence, and they walked through the gate into the front lawn. After a few minutes Mrs. Taylor took up the theme again.

"It may really be for the best. Archie is Archie's son. He has Archie's facile temperament. Everything came too easily to my husband. There was no struggle. It may be better for Archie that he should have his bread to earn. He shall have a good education: I am beginning to save already to send him to the University," she ended, with a faint smile.

"And you?"

"I must not think of myself as unhappy. I

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am not unhappy." Her eyes filled as she spoke, and she turned away her face for an instant. Then she looked at him again: "I have my own life to lead, and I shall try to make it a contented one. Archie must have a joyous childhood: children deserve so much, anyway. Besides, I came here as a bride; I am used to the little house; I am quite capable of running the farm—I did it a long time in Archie's lifetime, in fact, until I went to Redfields house to live, you know."

"To think that the merest chance—"

"I am old-fashioned, Mr. Henry, and I don't believe in chance in human affairs. I believe in a divine ordering. Please don't worry about it any more. Everything has been done that can be done. You are going to stay to luncheon, aren't you?" as he held out his hand to her.

"No, I thank you. To tell the truth, I am on my way to call on the new-comer. I thought I'd just ride up the lane and see if there was anything I could do for you."

"Thank you; all my friends have been so kind that I hardly have a chance to turn over my hand. Saint and Hugh Carrington took such complete charge of the moving, and you know Nannie stayed two whole weeks with me. Hugh would have sent over all his teams if there

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hadn't been half a dozen at Redfields that were idle, on account of the dry weather stopping fall ploughing."

Henry mounted his tall, lathy gray with the delectable rack, and rode at a dog-trot towards Redfields, his head bent forward, still puzzling the problem of the lost will.

Henry had heard, several days before, of the arrival of Trueman Gault, and at first would not admit curiosity as the reason for his visit. He conjured up all sorts of excuses for the call, till his sense of humor convicted him of his hypocrisy. Then he cheerfully admitted his failing, and, with lightened conscience, set out on his ride, though with a strong sense of antagonism in his heart towards Gault. The newcomer was a kind of Virginian, to be sure, but not the home-grown article; he was an interloper.

Henry had a good chance to inspect Trueman Gault as they sat together on the east terrace, smoking. Grudgingly he admitted that the new squire looked no unworthy successor to the old one; appeared not unlike him, indeed, with his large, well-knit frame and his directness of manner.

"I have never lived before in the country," Trueman was saying, "and I find it quite dif-

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ferent from my preconceived notions. It is much more—complex, I might call it, than I had any idea of.”

“Yes; I have been a lawyer all my life, till recently, and that is simple: a farmer has got to know a little of more things than any one else I know of.”

“It isn’t the knowing things that bothers me—a newspaper man has got to make a bluff at knowing pretty nearly everything—but a farmer not only has to know, but has to know how to *do* most everything. Abstract and applied knowledge are quite different propositions. I hope if any of my friends find me doing egregiously fool things, they’ll take me gently by the ear and lead me back outside the fire lines.”

“If it’s advice you want, you won’t find us niggardly. We’ll stop our own business any time to advise another person how to run his. And then we’ll stand and watch him all the rest of the day to see he does it right. And you may be sure we shall keep our eyes on you. This is the finest place in the neighborhood. Of course, it hasn’t the interest of Deer Hill for Daughters-of-Planters-Who-Educated-Their-Sons-in-England, or Nieces-of-Presidents-Who-Kept-a-Carriage—Deer Hill or Ashuelot or Shirley or

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Lower Brandon; but it will be an immense saving of provender for man and beast that it is not."

"Do you have them to entertain often?" Gault asked.

"Not I. Chinquapin was never stayed in overnight by a signer of the Declaration, so far as I can learn. I should try to conceal it, if one had. When the hordes appear, Carrington has to lock the gates of Deer Hill and put keep-off-the-grass signs all over his pastures. Jefferson once whittled a shucking-peg from a splinter of the porch. That seems to be the best-known fact about Deer Hill, and the reverend collectors continue to whittle away his porch in imitation of Jefferson, although—as Hugh tries to tell them—it isn't the same porch, but a new one."

Gault smiled. "By-the-way, there's one thing I've wondered about: what does every one do to amuse himself? I haven't been bored in the least myself, but I rather wonder sometimes that I am not."

"Amuse ourselves? H'm! That opens up a field of thought I have never entered into before. The question of amusement had not struck me as one to be planned for. The great difficulty is when to find time to work."

"Of course, the country's a novelty to me now," Trueman went on; "but one can't keep

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on forever trotting about the place and watching the negroes plough. And the evenings? Do you go out every evening? I have been, pretty nearly. I am afraid if I stayed at home they'd seem pretty dark and stupid."

"Wait till the light of the moon, and you begin co'tin' somebody. Then they won't be either dark or stupid. I used to keep two horses thin ridin' 'round, a few years ago. Plenty of pretty girls here, when you become a little better acquainted. I expect," Henry said, laughing, "the safest plan, if you want to escape, would be to sell Redfields at public auction and run back to New York."

"Speaking of riding," Gault said, "I picked up a pretty cob at a bargain the other day. They say you have a good deal of fox-hunting here in the winter, and I think Diana will make a very fair hunter. Will you have a look at her?"

They went to a paddock covered with bluegrass, so thick and luscious as to make Henry's envy as green as the sod. The new horse proved tolerant of close inspection. Henry glanced over the short, thick neck, the long, round cannon-bones, the fat, round barrel, and the very slight slope to the shoulders.

"She's a pretty color, isn't she?" Gault suggested.

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"Fat's the prettiest color, anyway," Henry assented. "She seems to be sound, and looks as if she would be easy to keep, she's so short coupled. Does she gait?"

"No. You know in New York we only ride trotting horses."

"This is the mare Terry used to drive in his surrey, isn't it?"

"Yes. He wanted to sell me a little gaited horse, but he wasn't up to my weight. As soon as I saw this mare I offered him two hundred and fifty for her, and we closed the deal at once."

"H'm!" said Henry. In Eastover County two hundred and fifty dollars was a big price for a horse.

"She seems to be pretty fast, too. I put a boy up on one of the carriage-horses, and it was wonderful to see how she outstripped him. A Mr. St. Clair called here the other day. He seemed to know quite a lot about racing horses, and I suggested having her trained for a runner—in county fairs and that sort of thing—and he said there might be something in it."

Henry looked away to the mountains. Early training at poker gives one control over the visibility of one's emotions. One is often grateful for this, even if acquired at some cost.

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"Are you much interested in farming?" Henry asked.

"Very much. But there seems to be a certain unreadiness among the hands to try the improved methods I have read about—don't you find it so?"

"Not to the extent you imply. Negroes usually do what they are told without argument."

"But they don't seem to be convinced of the improvement—besides, my overseer is a white man."

"There isn't much in farming besides a living, anyway," Henry said, with his easy philosophy. "Most of us barely make a living."

"Surely my uncle made money," Gault argued. "And Mr. Carrington is called a rich man, and that Mr. St. Clair didn't dress like a poor one."

"Your uncle and Carrington made money farming. I don't believe St. Clair ever made a cent at it (he has a little left him by an aunt); and the other rich men in the neighborhood, like Colonel Sanford, made their money elsewhere, and then came back here, where they were raised, and bought back or fixed up their family plantations: farming to them is an amusement. And so it really is to all of us." Henry dropped back into his usual mood. "A few of

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us make money out of our amusement. Some of us scratch around and get a good living out of it, and others get the amusement without the living. After all, if you've got a good girl and a good horse, you're all right. And if you've got a bad girl and a good horse, well, you're still all right. Good-bye, Mr. Gault, come and see me."

At Cartersbrook post-office Henry came upon St. Clair conferring with Mr. King, the postmaster.

"I hear you told our new neighbor there was something in training his mare," Henry said to St. Clair.

"So I did; but I didn't specify for whom." Then to the postmaster: "Nonsense, Mr. King, I haven't sent two foreign letters this month."

"How are you, Mr. Henry?" Mr. King said. "Your sister must have sent one, then, Saint, for I charged two to you. Two foreign and eight local letters come to twenty-six cents. When they send the boy with the letters I reckon they'd better say how many are to be stamped for you and whose the others are, so there won't be any trouble. Mr. Jim Ca'ington always does."

"All right. Anything for a quiet life," St. Clair answered. "Here's a quarter. Let the other cent run on." He turned to Henry. "How

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do you like the brand - new one? What d' you think of his cigars?"

"I like them better than his being there."

"Oh, nonsense! Henry, you're prejudiced. Gault is all right. Wave your cap with the rest. Long live the king! I'm going up there to strike him for supper. Things are squally at home."

VI

IN spite of Gault's advanced ideas on farming, he became more sensible of the value of the time-worn system, as he saw that things went on from day to day with no apparent hitch. That the overseer was often at his wits' end, and that the responsibilities now upon him were new, Gault did not even suspect. In the days of old General Gault, the details of ordinary work were left more or less to the overseer, but all larger questions of farm economy involving judgment or decision were always submitted to the master.

The new owner found that, according to the "system," he was expected to pull the big farm bell at half - past four in the morning. This involved no little hardship to a man accustomed to late rising, even if he returned to bed immediately afterwards—a sequence not in the system. An alarm-clock helped him, but he was resolved to change the system in this respect without undue delay. A certain oversight of the work seemed also to be expected of him by over-

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seer and hands, but it struck him as a waste of time and energy to sit on horseback all day, watching the men work on something that they knew a great deal more about than he did.

He came in one noon with his hands and feet nearly frozen, and his face all drawn from the cold wind, to find St. Clair snugly ensconced with a novel by the fireplace.

"I thought Virginia was a warm country," ejaculated Trueman. "And your thermometers are so blamed unsatisfactory." He went over and looked at the one hanging outside the window. "Here's this one only says thirty - eight, and I never was so nearly dead with cold in my life."

"Better keep in-doors, then," St. Clair answered, easily. "Riding's cold work: stirrups are cold—reins are cold—can't keep your hands in your pockets—no exercise. I don't expect to stir out of this room until a warm spell. What's the use?"

"That's what I am always saying to myself, What's the use?" Gault said, rubbing his hands stiffly together before the fire.

"Plenty of use. Keeps your hands interested—prevents waste. But I can't do it. I try to get up in the morning, and see my mules fed at

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night. That's my limit—and I don't live up to that."

"I thought everybody did it."

"Great goodness, no! General Gault, they say, used to. Hugh Carrington does. There are some others, and the small farmers, who work themselves, of course do; but it has not yet, thank Heaven, become a general malady."

"If I thought it did any good, I'd keep on; but it's deucedly uncomfortable. Here's dinner. Let's draw the table up this way, so that we sha'n't lose any heat."

St. Clair stayed at Redfields for three days. He became lost in a book during the day, and the evenings passed quickly, with toddies and cigars and a guitar that gently twanged under his sympathetic fingers. The affairs of his own farm weighed lightly on his mind, particularly now when the corn crop was only just shucked, and there was no sign of the corn-house floor appearing. By the last of March it was likely that both his corn-house and his hay-barns might be empty, and it was then his fit of energy would come, his high resolve never to let this happen again—a worthy resolve, but one needing something to bolster it when the summer grass sprang up and his stock could run out. St. Clair was an ideal guest. He made himself at home, and

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required no effort on his behalf from Trueman. His presence was pleasant, yet not in the least obtrusive, and his host managed to slip away one afternoon to Highwood without feeling that he must account for his absence. And if the cold weather froze the New-Yorker's agricultural enthusiasm, he was quite unmindful of it when his mare's head was turned towards the Sanford place.

The day St. Clair went away was one of those Virginian days that fully compensate for all her mud and occasional bleakness. A sky of Italian blue and a softness of atmosphere that increased as the sun rose made the mere joy of living a sufficiency. Trueman rode out to an upland corn-field, where his men were pulling off corn and tying up the fodder of the last of the crop. The recent cold weather had prevented this being done before. There was no wind, and Trueman pulled off the overcoat which had seemed a necessity early in the morning and laid it across the cantle of his saddle. He heard a horn in the distance several times, without thinking anything of it, when suddenly a loud yell startled him, and he looked up to see one of his jean-clad negroes running off as hard as he could. Stalks were dropped on the instant by every one, and the band of laborers went

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dodging among the corn-shocks across the field.

This was not such a surprise to Gault as his overseer's behavior; for that usually sober man unhitched the traces of his saddle-mule, and, swinging himself up on him, tore after the laborers, shouting "Hi! hi! hi!" at the top of his voice.

Then over the corn-field fence came a swarm of fox-hounds, and a chorus of deep-throated cries passed by. Just as the clamor began to fade, he heard a strong voice letting out piercing yells, and "Go on, boys!" to the hounds. The leader checked his horse to a stand-still at the fence, jumped off, pulled down a rail, scrambled over, his horse bucking over after him, remounted and was off again. At the same time a big horse carrying a hatless man came at another panel at full speed. The top rail splintered and flew into pieces as he struck it, but horse and man landed safely.

"Come on, Gault!" cried the rider, and Truman recognized Hugh Carrington. Hugh checked his horse somewhat, and, sitting sideways in his saddle, looked back over his shoulder to watch his wife take the fence. She flew it without tipping it, and Hugh turned his horse loose again.

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Gault felt the blood flow warmly through his veins, and a whoop came unexpectedly from his lips as he threw his overcoat in the wagon-body and turned his fretting mare after the others. Diana seemed to fly over the ground, but, try as she would, the distance between him and the leaders increased, and, before he reached the next fence, four more men had passed him, among them St. Clair. This fence offered no difficulties, since the leader's horse had crashed straight through a weak panel. Across the long stretch of sod beyond they swept, following the course of the creek. The fence that bounded this field also yielded to the assaults of some of the first riders, and Gault's mare went at a panel left standing a scant two feet; but it seemed to him as she rose over the débris that she rose very high, and he found himself, stirrupless and hatless, clinging to her mane and bumping along on her withers, like a drop of grease on a hot pan. A locust bough swept him off before many rods. Fortunately, he was not hurt, and he limped up to where the fox had run to earth near by. A dozen horses were tied to the limbs of trees surmounting a small bluff, while their riders stood or sat at ease on rocks. He was introduced to Mr. Terry, who had divided the honors of first in with Carrington.

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Terry acknowledged the introduction with difficulty, since he was lying at full length on the ground, surrounded by yelping dogs and jabbing into a hole with a forked stick. Carrington stood beside him, kicking away the hounds when they got too near the seat of operations.

"I can't reach him," Terry said, finally, withdrawing his clay-smirched arm. "Give me Jim."

Jim was passed him, and disappeared down the hole with a yelp of delight. There was a muffled snarling, and presently Jim reappeared tail first.

Carrington took Terry's place with a longer stick. He punched and twisted it around in the hole, and, withdrawing it, examined the end carefully.

"He's there, boys." He pointed to a few significant red hairs. "Now to dig him out. Whose house are we nearest?"

"Mine," answered Gault. "Won't all of you come down and get luncheon?"

"Not just yet, thanks," Carrington said; "but if you'd let us have a mattock and a shovel or two—"

"And a nigger or two," put in St. Clair.

"Why, certainly," Gault answered.

"I'll go and get them," Terry said, mounting his horse and riding off.

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After half an hour he returned with a mattock and shovel, and reported that the negroes were coming.

Carrington laid aside his coat and waistcoat, and set to work to dig out the fox.

"Hugh swings his mattock like a nigra grubbin' new ground," said Terry.

"He wouldn't last from sun to sun at that pace. I believe he knows something about it, though. Watch him cut the roots," St. Clair remarked.

"I heard a story on Hugh the other day. It may not be true, but it suhtainly sounds like it might be. 'Twas last harvest-time, and Hugh had a lot of niggers cuttin' cawn. They'd been sorter gettin' their courage up for some time, and finally one big nigger says: 'Mr. Hugh, we don't like to make no complaint, but we ain't gettin' nuff to eat.' 'What's this?' says Hugh; 'not enough to eat on Hill Acres plantation? We'll go and see the cook.' Hugh takes the nigger down to the quarter, and he says, 'See here, cook, these niggers say they don't get enough to eat. Now, you go to the smoke-house and get a side of bacon, and go to the cellar and get a barrel of apples, and stuff these fellows till they're full.' Then he says to the nigger, 'You hear what I told the cook, boy?' 'Yas 'r,'

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says the nigra. 'Is that all right, boy?' 'Yas, *suh*,' says he. When the nigger was gone, Hugh turns to the cook and says, 'That's all right about the meat and apples, but you push forward the apples and hold back on the meat.'"

Terry was applauded vociferously.

Carrington threw down the mattock. "All right, Terry," he said, good-humoredly. "Now you push forward your muscle and hold back your jaw for a while."

"Old man Perry ought to be here now. He always could tell eve'ybody how to dig out a fox better 'n anybody else—him with his tickler," said Aubrey. "Must 'a' been near a hundred when he died. I don't reckon there ever was anybody keener after a fox than he was. There was only one thing he liked better, an' he used to carry that with him. He told me two days before he died that he'd 'a' gone long before, but he knew every old woman in the cyounty'd say 'Drink got him at last.' Ha! ha! Wouldn't die, just to spite 'em."

One after the other they attacked the hole fiercely. Gault tried to do his part with the rest; but he found, to his surprise, that the mattock very soon weighed more than he had thought, and that there was considerable to learn about

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the use of it. St. Clair, seeing that he tired, good-naturedly called time and took his place.

The negroes came along after a while, and the mattock passed over to them. The early darkness descended before the fox was unearthed. They carefully stopped the hole, that he might not escape in the night, and adjourned to Redfields, all except Carrington and a few whose homes were near by.

VII

A WHOLLY famished and very beaten-out crowd confronted Uncle Billy as he pushed aside the doors of the Redfields dining-room and announced that supper was served. Gault had sent word home of their coming by Terry, when he rode in for the shovels. The smoke-house had furnished its two-year-old hams, and the chicken-yard its choicest, and the mud-spattered guests revived beneath their influence. Gault, after a consultation with Uncle Billy, handed the latter a key, and presently some old home-grown sherry aided the consumption of the plenteous ham and chicken, while little negroes trod on one another's heels with relays of hot bread. Boxes of cigars stood on the sideboard, flanked with decanters of whiskey. At first the devotion of the fox-hunters to their viands excluded every other consideration; then their singleness of interest began to flag, and the day's run, that never-failing subject of debate, crept in.

"I ran this same fox twice last winter," Terry

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said. "Once we dug him out in Mrs. Taylor's woods and turned him out, and he got away."

"I'll bet he don't get away to-morrow," said a tall man named Leigh. "Not if old Belle gets her nose after him."

"Well, I'm just fool enough to bet he does, Book or Bell or Candle after him," St. Clair said. Turning to his host, he continued: "I fell in with the hunt about half an hour after I left Redfields. They'd already run one fox, but lost him at Little Bird Creek. I'd have come back for you if I'd had time."

"I made sure Carrington had you, Terry," Aubrey said. "That big bay passed us like we done tuck root."

"He would have, but he pulled up for Miss Nan. What was the matter with her mare? That Tanis is one of the finest fillies Hugh ever raised."

"She balked at a fence—but, Lord! how Miss Nan did ride! Biff went her whip, and Tanis stood straight up, but she went over," St. Clair answered from the sideboard.

"Good work!" said Terry. "My old horse won't jump except like a mule, and he won't rise at all to a weak panel; but he can everlastingly get over the ground. Hay, sheriff, where was Chunky, the old steeple-chaser?"

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"We're getting a little stiff, Chunky and I, and we fell into a fence. I've got a boy leading him around now. One of his fore-legs is out of the running. Mistuh Gault, your health!"

All moved over to the sideboard, the first of frequent trips thereafter. Sofas and easy-chairs were pulled up to the fireplace, and the history of the run gone over again. Later the musical talent of the company asserted itself, and

"Run, nigger, run,
Patterroller ketch you;
Run, nigger, run,
It's almost day,"

rolled out in chorus, following St. Clair's clear tenor voice. Major Sykes started another song, but stopped in the middle; pleaded that he had forgotten the rest, and sank into an arm-chair and instant sleep. As the night advanced the bursts of revelry and song became more fitful and of shorter duration.

Trueman desisted from further trips to the sideboard himself, warned by a haziness of the eyes and a buzzing in his head; though his guests seemed to him to remain quite sober, except for a disposition to make noise and sing forgotten songs, or to fall into gentle slumber.

St. Clair, curled up in a big arm-chair with a guitar, was singing softly to himself.

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"Hi!" yelled Terry, coming into the room after a trip out to see the night; "everybody asleep?"

"Oh, go to bed!" said Leigh, opening an eye from the sofa. "We all want to be up in the morning. I want to catch that fox."

"And look at Saint," yelled Terry. "Clean broke down and fiddling away at a love-song."

"“Could ye come back to me, Douglas!”"

he bawled, at the top of his voice.

"Give that calf a feed," St. Clair responded.

"Get on the key, you braying mule."

"Hark *at* him!" cried Terry. "He doesn't know the key from the key-hole."

A group in the corner, still wakeful, joined forces with Terry. "What shall we sing?" asked one.

"Sing anything you blame please," answered St. Clair; "I'm going to bed. Gault, I suppose I can find a shakedown somewhere up-stairs not already pre-empted?"

"Saint swung a mattock ten minutes to-day. I always knew he'd faint away if he hit a few hard licks," Terry jeered. "Give him the smelling-salts—put a pillow under his head."

"Look here, Terry," said St. Clair. "You seem to be laboring under the impression that

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I'm broke down. Now, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll get on my horse and ride around Redfields lawn here as long as you can sit on your horse in the middle of it."

"Come on!" cried Terry.

They went out, followed by a few noisy spirits, and hunted up a negro to saddle their horses. St. Clair mounted his hunter; then Terry weakened.

"I'll back you against the world, Saint! I crawl: it's too hard on the horses. They've got to get up and scratch to-morrow. Come in and let's get some sleep."

The sheriff, lantern in hand, came out of a box-stall as they passed by on the way to the house.

"How's old Chunky's leg?" Terry asked.

"Groggy," said the sheriff. "I've been out here ever since supper, bathing him in cold water. He'll be stiff a day or two, I reckon, but he's tough."

Trueman was awakened in the morning by the man who had shared his bed. The sun slanted across the room, and from outside came the long, deep notes of the fox-horn. From the various rooms sleepy-eyed men, pulling on coats and waistcoats, joined them as they descended the stairs. In the dining-room Leigh and St.

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Clair were lighting pipes after their breakfast, while others were still eating. The table was a litter of plates of sliced ham, chicken legs, and piles of "light bread" and corn pone, interspersed with cups. Three coffee-pots steamed on the hearth, and Billy, aided by the overseer, was administering to the wants of the guests. Two sleepy men on sofas had not yet achieved the strength of mind to get up, in spite of the noise and the clatter of plates.

The horn sounded again, in the hall this time, and Terry and the sheriff burst in, hungry but jubilant. "Went out before sun-up," the sheriff shouted, "snatched some of your niggers, and dug him out. We've sent round word to everybody that we had him. The man that leads the field to-day will ride a good horse."

Carrington joined the party before there was any sign of a general adjournment, his wife waiting outside; and all hastened out on the lawn to greet her and to make ready for the hunt. Major Hudson rode up next, and then others came, singly or in small groups, spurring up the lane, lest they be late. Gault's negroes and mules, despatched by Terry as messengers, had done their work well.

Two days before, Redfields lawn had been a quiet vista of winter-browened grass, traced with

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the shadows of the leafless trees. To-day it was a confused mass of moving men, women, and horses, each new-comer cheerily greeted, and the horses neighing frantic welcomes of their own.

Gault was on his lawn, speaking to such as he knew, and receiving introductions to the others. Of all that his new home had offered him, this was the best. The ownership of Redfields had a significance it had not possessed before. As the minutes passed, however, and the preparations for the hunt progressed, he began to fear that Virginia Sanford and her father were not coming, although he had been assured that word had been sent to them. At last they came cantering up, the colonel in a McClellan saddle, with long stirrups and the military seat, Virginia in a beautifully fitting habit, which, as well as her flat English saddle, were markedly lacking in signs of wear. Her seat on the horse was correct, thanks to the riding-lessons; but she was visibly nervous, and bowed to those she knew in a constrained manner, as if she were afraid of destroying the equilibrium of the *tout ensemble*.

"Why, we're late!" she cried, as their host and several other men came up to greet them. "This is the first thing I've been to down here that I've not been the first one."

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"It is immemorial custom to be on time at a fox-hunt," St. Clair assured her. "It is easier to do because it is the only occasion when you must be."

"Won't you dismount and come up on the terrace?" Trueman urged her.

"No, thank you, True. I've got on a safety skirt, and I daren't move in it or it will come apart in every seam—and I couldn't explain I had paid sixteen dollars extra for that."

"Sixteen dollars!" laughed Nannie Carrington, who had ridden up; "that's just what the whole of mine cost, down at Eastover."

Virginia looked enviously at the Virginian controlling her sixteen-hand filly with instinctive ease. Nannie laughed and talked, undisturbed by the fretting of her four-year-old. The mare was pawing nervously and throwing her head up, and then plunging it down to the ground in impatience of the restraining hands of her rider.

"I wish," Virginia said, admiringly, "I could trade habits and horsemanship with you."

"Why, I thought you'd ridden all your life, the way you cantered up," Nannie answered, politely, leaning forward and patting her mare's neck soothingly as she gathered her quarters under her and half reared.

"Miss Nan can give cards and spades to most

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of us when she's on Tanis," St. Clair said. "Colonel, aren't you afraid to jump in a McClellan saddle?"

"We're not going to follow to-day—except discreetly along the high-road."

"No; papa is afraid I shall come apart like my seams," Virginia said, regretfully

"Will you lengthen that martingale a trifle?" Nannie said to Trueman. "I don't want to cramp her head when she jumps."

"H'm!" Gault said, looking at the martingale doubtfully.

St. Clair laughed at his friend's perplexed expression, and did what Nannie had asked of Gault. "Easy to see you don't saddle your own horse," he said.

Terry, as the unofficial master-of-hounds, came galloping up the lawn, carrying a kicking object in a bag across the pommel of his saddle, the hounds trailing behind. "Here, you boys, catch those hounds," he yelled at some negroes. "What d' you let them out of the barn for? We've got to give the fox fifteen minutes' start."

He called Carrington and St. Clair to oneside, and the three held a consultation.

"We'll turn out in the Dripping Spring field," Carrington announced.

There was a hurried mounting of horses, and

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the riders streamed through the gate. Trueman's overseer, on one of the carriage horses, rode up to his master as the latter moved away by Virginia's side.

"Shall we go on ploughing?" he asked.

"Go ahead. Anything you want to," Trueman answered.

"If you don't mind, I'd like to see the start," the overseer said, hesitatingly.

"All right," Trueman answered.

"Oh! I *wish* I were going to start with them," Virginia cried, in an ecstasy of desire.

"I wish I were sure of coming back with them," Gault amended. "A horse never seemed to me such a strange, unaccountable beast as at this moment. And look at Miss Nan, as they call her, caracoling along as if she hadn't a thing to do but admire the scenery."

"Yes; isn't it wonderful!" she answered, in the awed tone of the devotee.

The whole plantation seemed to have taken a holiday. As they rode down the lane they came upon groups of blacks of all sizes, who nudged one another at each well-known rider. There was a continual bowing and doffing of caps by the fringe of spectators, for the well-bred negro loves to observe all the usages of polite society.

The cavalcade went through a gate and across

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several fields, and pulled up on a knoll. Excited negroes held the hounds, while others tightened girths or held restive horses—any excuse to be there. Old Chunky, carrying the sheriff, swung along at a brisk shamble.

"I love it!" Nannie Carrington called to Miss Sanford, her eyes sparkling as her horse trembled and pawed violently with excitement. "They've turned him loose—there goes the fox! This fifteen minutes is the hardest part of it all."

The fox went across the field before them, in short leaps, with his tremendous tail dragging behind him, seeming to make only poor speed. There was not thought for anything else until he was lost behind a hedgerow. Then Carrington joined his wife.

"Be a little easy on the filly, Nan. Remember she's only four, and had a pretty hard run yesterday."

Terry, St. Clair, and Henry, aided by half a dozen boys, were swinging on to the howling, leaping dogs, frenzied by the scent of the fox. There was hurried mounting by those not already in the saddle, and a quarter of an hour of suspense, of fidgeting horses, and of beating pulses.

"Keep back there on the left," cried Terry. "Don't anybody ride over the dogs, now! Stay

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back until they cross the creek. All right, Saint!"

"Turn 'em loose!" yelled Carrington.

"I'm going to try to follow you, Mrs. Carrington," Trueman said. "Please pick easy places for me to fall on."

Nannie Carrington glanced at his round-legged, short-necked mount. "Don't let me keep you back," she said, demurely.

"Come on, now!" yelled Terry, and the hunt was on.

For the first quarter of a mile differences in horseflesh are not very noticeable in a wide, straggling crowd. Trueman's bay seemed to him going at a terrific speed, and he was surprised that he only maintained the same relative position as at the start. Mrs. Carrington's chestnut at his side seemed hardly going faster than a hand gallop. This was his last thought outside his own difficulties for some time. His four reins bothered him as they never had in Central Park; and, for the rest, keeping his seat and his stirrups occupied all his attention. Once, as his mare swerved at a rock, he lost his balance completely, and only a hard bump from a passing rider saved him. He hardly heard the man's swift apology. Daily riding on the road at a trot and canter had given him no hint of this. Down-

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hill went the galloping mass of which he was an atom. He clung to the pommel of his saddle with both hands. And Nannie Carrington, looking over her shoulder, pointed to the river-flats ahead, and said: "There's where we shall go along."

The horses began to extend themselves as they came to the sandy loam and the smoother going. Trueman found it easier here, where his mare was not dodging among rocks and unevennesses of the ground.

Carrington, St. Clair, and the sheriff, in some way that Gault could not make out, had soon a considerable lead. In the middle distance, between them and the struggling ruck, a flying chestnut, with a black, woman's habit blown back, was closing up the gap. Gault, among the last few riders, felt a prayerful loss of conceit with his own riding, and thankfulness at his escape from the dangers of the gallop down the hill. Keeping him company were several old men, contentedly pottering along on shaggy little horses, and one very fat man whose weight had overcome the enthusiasm of his horse. Henry was not very far ahead on his gray, and presently stopped and called out:

"They've lost him! Now he'll probably make for Jim Carrington's woods, and then he ain't no fox of ours."

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He turned his horse sharply to the left, and made straight for a patch of woods on the horizon, followed by the others of the rear-guard.

It turned out as Henry predicted. The hounds lost the fox on the cliff by the river. After a half-hour of scolding the dogs and furious horn-blasts, the scent was found again in the meadow, but towards noon it became so weak that some of the hounds began to hunt rabbits. The company, too, was thinning out. Carrington and his wife left the party at a check near Hill Acres. Only a few of the more ardent kept on. Terry and St. Clair were forever on the move among the dogs, encouraging, scolding, beating the rabbit-hunters. Gault kept with the hunt.

When the excitement of swift riding was no longer on him, Gault began to realize that he was chafed and lame in various places that seemed singularly well provided with nerves. Creases formed in his breeches and seared him like red-hot irons. Liquid fire seemed to have been rubbed into his flesh in spots. He ached all over, and every motion of the horse made each ache worse. He tried sitting farther forward and farther back in the saddle, and around sideways on one thigh and then on the other, in hopes of wearing himself in new places instead of rubbing

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the old galls, but did not succeed in relieving his pain in the least.

Henry rode smoothly along beside Gault, as the latter bumped in his saddle at a jog-trot. "Warwick can't run with your thoroughbreds," he said; "but my experience is that you spend more time fooling around and riding home than you do galloping. You look mighty near played out. Better buy yourself a horse with some kind of a ridin' gait."

VIII

THEY lost the fox for good and all a few miles farther down the river. The upper James takes many a twist and turn, and as the hunters stopped, debating what to do next, True-man asked St. Clair where they were.

St. Clair glanced around the horizon. "Oh yes," he said, after a short survey. "If you head straight for that bluff and keep on through the pines you'll strike the railroad. Cross it and keep on till you come to a road; turn to your right, and after a little you'll be there."

"Where—Redfields?" Gault queried in astonishment.

"No; better than that," St. Clair laughed. "Well, I'm going to Eastover; better come along."

"No, thank you; not after the straight and narrow way has been pointed out to me," True-man answered, turning his horse. "Good-bye," he called to the others. "It's been a great day."

Gault felt done in a manner new in his experience. An ache gnawed him from neck to heels.

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The distance to the county road seemed interminable. When he got there, he dismounted and led his horse. He was so tired that the expedition took on a humorous aspect. Every motion of the horse had become positive physical torture; walking was tremendous relief. St. Clair had unmistakably indicated Highwood as near. If he could only sit down in a chair for an hour or two and get a meal, he felt that he might manage to reach home.

The sound of wheels came from behind, and Trueman led his horse to one side of the road. The unexpected happened—his customary good-fortune.

"Why, True," Virginia Sanford said, pulling up her horse, "are you hurt, or anything?"

"No," he answered, "just dead beat." He smiled up at her sitting in the wide buggy. It seemed the most natural thing in the world that she should be there at that moment. "Curious, how tired I am. I think I could pick up St. Clair and run away with him, yet he's as fresh as you please."

"Such a brave start it was," she said. "We followed along the road until you went out of sight. Get in and drive home with me. Your horse will lead, won't he?"

"If she won't, she can stay here until I need

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her again," Trueman said. "Will you come with us," he said to the mare, "or spend the night in the woods? It's a matter of entire indifference to me, Diana."

The mare led willingly; and driving, after the agony that the latter part of his riding had been, seemed almost too blissful to be possible on this earth. Burke never had Gault's experience of this morning or he would not have said that the cessation of pain was not pleasure.

Trueman spent the night at Highwood, accepting Colonel Sanford's invitation with avidity. When he went to bed, though, he was so tired that for a long time he could not go to sleep. There seemed to be no position of rest for the ache between his shoulders.

Next morning the sun, pouring in at his window, deprived Trueman of an hour's sleep that would have benefited him. He tried to shut out the light by throwing his arm across his eyes, and the movement brought back to his consciousness the utter weariness of every muscle in his body, a weariness that during the night seemed to have settled upon him heavier than ever.

There are few fatigues so thorough as that produced by the horse on one unaccustomed to riding long distances. At the top of Gault's spine,

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just below the neck, was a dull, wearing pain, so ingrained it seemed to him he could never get rid of it again. His whole back ached, and all his muscles were so stiffened that he moved like a rheumatic old man. The inside of both knees was chafed so that it was torture to put on his clothes; and one long, red welt underneath his thigh indicated where a persistent crease in his breeches had punished him.

He had forgotten to wind up his watch, but concluded that it was not late from his not having been called.

"Hullo, True! Awake at last?" Virginia said, when he managed to drag himself down-stairs. "We thought you'd rather be let sleep than called to breakfast."

Trueman glanced at the clock and saw that it was nearly eleven o'clock. "I was so tired last night that I forgot to wind my watch," he apologized.

"Well, I have kept something for you, and after you have done eating we can go out and see how your horse stood the ride."

"No; don't let's. I don't think I ever want to see a riding-horse again. There's nothing at the present moment would give me greater pleasure than the thought of a net-work of trolley-lines running all over the county."

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Colonel Sanford came into the room. "Morning, Gault. You and I seem to have changed ages." He grinned at his guest's stiff movements. "I feel like a two-year-old myself. Guess you won't feel like riding again soon. Tell you what we'll do: get 'Ginia to drive you over, when you go, and I'll ride your horse. I don't suppose you have the old Virginia idea that it is effeminate to be seen in anything with wheels. My father never was in a carriage—except at the time of his marriage—until he was sixty-five years old. Then a colt he was gentling threw him and broke his hip, and when he was getting well my sister persuaded him to let her drive him out a few times. You ought to have seen his sheepish look when she helped him into the old phaeton. 'I declare, daughter, I feel mightily ashamed to be seen this way,' he said. 'Let's drive up into the Flatwoods, where nobody 'll see me.'"

"I'm effeminate enough to ride in a hearse," Trueman answered, with a laugh, "if it will keep me off a horse to-day."

In Colonel Sanford's manner towards him, Trueman experienced one of the pleasantest phases of his change of fortune. In New York, while they were of the same birth and breeding, there yet had been a tremendous difference be-

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tween the struggling reporter and one who was on familiar terms with railroads and trusts. This difference had probably been more formidable to Trueman himself than to Virginia. The points of view of those to whom luxuries are luxuries and those to whom they are necessities seem sometimes so hopelessly far asunder to the former that nothing can bridge them. On one occasion, when his hopes and aspirations had surged within him, Gault had told Virginia that he had just got the chance of acting as press agent for a certain firm, in addition to his regular work, and should thereby make ten dollars a week extra. "But ten dollars is hardly worth while, is it?" she had said; "you said it was lots of trouble." For an instant he had sat tongue-tied, and she saw that she had made a mistake, and tried to retrieve herself: "Ten dollars a week, that's forty dollars a month; why that is a good deal, after all." But the sense of how much smaller ten dollars looked to her than it did to him had come over him with overwhelming force, and he had never again spoken to her of his business hopes.

There was a slight but noticeable difference in his bearing, too. It had the poise of a successful man, instead of the assertion of an aspiring one, though he probably had done

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more deserving work in New York than since coming to Virginia. The word "independent," as used in connection with material prosperity, had gained a new significance for him of late. When Trueman was a small boy he had once had a memorable interview with his grandfather, when the latter made his only trip to New York to see his younger son. The grandfather was a man whose idiosyncrasies had been given full growth in the free atmosphere of Virginia, till he had developed into what ordinary men, smoothed and rounded by close contact with each other, call "a character." To his small grandson he felt that he ought—seeing him thus for the only time—to leave a piece of advice that would stay by him through life; and with a profanity which the ordinary grandfather would have eschewed under the circumstances, he said: "Trueman, when you grow up, you live your life so that you can look any damn man in the eye and tell him to go to hell!"

Trueman had never forgotten the advice, chiefly because of the shock to his young soul at hearing such wicked words from such venerable lips. The soundness of his grandfather's words came to him gradually as he grew older, and had to scuffle for a living himself. As a wage-earner, however, he found that there

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were occasions when it was necessary to receive words from his superiors that his grandfather would rather have wished him to address to them; and that it was not less valuable training sometimes to bear hot words than to speak them. Nevertheless, in the position of absolute independence in which he now found himself, his character, after its previous discipline, expanded.

Few young men could have had Gault's good fortune and had his head turned less. It is so easy to see one's own deserts in the "unearned increments" that come to one—as easy as to see malignant persecution in the misfortunes which follow our own incompetencies. The sun shone warm and soothingly on Trueman's back as Virginia drove him home in the afternoon. And was not the warmth of the sun, as the soft springs of the buggy, and the girl at his side, with her interest in him—were these not all tributes to his worth? Life was appreciative of a good fellow.

IX

IT would be hard to say which of the two, Trueman or Virginia, most enjoyed and entered into the life of Eastover County during this winter. There is a fascination about Virginia life which can hardly be analyzed. Virginians take it as a matter of course that their State is superior to any other; but their feeling of certitude on this point is a provincialism, and in no way explains the interest certain persons without a New England conscience — or with a reaction from enlarged New England conscience—find in Virginia. They seem to be in almost a hypnotic state: they love the bad roads and the red mud, the difference from the suburban neatness of the North, the capacity for the pleasure of the moment, the absolute inability to conceive of a life more desirable. The Virginian who cannot afford five cents may spend a dollar, or charge five, in a whole-souled manner that is thoroughly captivating. In him, of a truth, is the old joke a fact: give him the luxuries of life and he will willingly forego the ne-

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cessities. From the plough he may unhitch his horse to join in a fox-hunt; and if insufficient fences permit his hogs to break into his corn, why, "They're my hogs and my corn," he says, philosophically.

It is true there come times when philosophy will not keep away the pinch of want. The wood-pile, come to an end while he fox-hunts in the pleasant fall days, necessitates green wood for the winter. But what if the logs have to be heaped into the fireplace sappy and crusted with snow: "Green wood burns longer than dry," says the Virginian; and he really believes that it is an economy. And the visitor from the North sees none of the hardships. True, he learns that to be warm one must keep within a certain radius of the fire, and keep turning about as on a pivot. But this is only an added picturesqueness. And after one becomes accustomed to the open-air breath of the halls and the corners of the room, a furnace-heated house appears unpleasant and unwholesome, and one sympathizes with the old lady who had the stove—provided by the thoughtfulness of a daughter—removed, "because it made the whole room so hot all over."

The visitor is always welcome at table, and the poverty never pinches there. It may be

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few books he sees are very modern; but they are all the better for that: and, anyway, when the sky invites out, what need of books? The saddles may be old and the horses thin, but the seat of the riders is largely the balance seat, independent of saddles and girths, and the horses have crosses of thoroughbred blood in them which make them hold their heads as high as their masters and keep after the hounds with a vim independent of oats and corn. In Virginia, poverty is borne in so thoroughbred a manner it becomes an adornment. There are no apologies for it. If referred to at all, it is as a joke—a joke whose point touches nearly all.

The winter passed away quickly for Gault, and he never had time to speculate again—as he had with Henry, soon after his arrival—as to how he should amuse himself. He was in that primary stage of the love of the horse when merely being on his back was end enough in life. Doubt of his own judgment in the matter of horseflesh had come to him early, and he had appealed to St. Clair:

“Tell me honestly: Diana isn’t a really good hunter, is she?”

“Well,” St. Clair answered, cautiously, “the good Lord didn’t *intend* for her to hunt.”

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"Won't you sell me your horse?"

"Oh, Roanoke wouldn't suit you," St. Clair replied, airily; and Trueman never knew what the answer cost him. In spite of a legacy from an aunt, which gave him a small, regular income, in addition to the irregular returns from his farm, St. Clair was chronically hard up, as most men are whose planning lies in the direction of spending money rather than of saving or making it. And Gault was so manifestly a pigeon, it was hard not to act the hawk. Indeed, St. Clair had first called on the new owner of Redfields more to see if there might not be a chance for turning a dollar easily than from a desire to acquire a friend. But when thus directly asked to buy Gault a suitable mount, he felt that he could not sell him his own, although the horse was one that, under a good man, was the equal of any in the county. Gault, in spite of his new humility in regard to his riding, would have been startled to know how very low in the equestrian scale he stood in his friend's opinion. With Gault on Roanoke, St. Clair would have feared a broken neck, or, at best, a runaway and a ruined horse. Horse-trading among friends is risky, even when both are capable of judging. The personal equation is magnified hugely when transmitted through the horse.

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The fox-hunts came regularly twice a week, when the weather was good, and Gault did not miss one of them. Between whiles, and in bad weather, he was forever on the back of either Diana or Tanis—gentler of disposition than Roanoke—whom he bought from Carrington. His laborers never knew when he would come upon them, nor from which direction; for it became a matter of pride with him—the pride of a man not quite sure of himself—to disdain gates as a means of ingress into a field unless the fence were uniformly of a forbidding height. He soon knew all the low panels on his farm, and had regular routes about it, like a rabbit's runways among the briars. And his farm-hands not only took more interest in their work from his irregularly constant oversight, but began to have pride in him as a sportsman. Your negro and poor white likes to take his sport vicariously, even if he cannot indulge in it himself.

Gault had a number of falls, but luckily escaped without any serious hurt. His horses were not so fortunate. Once, when Diana turned a complete somersault by being put at too high a jump when she was tired, she sprained her back, and had to be laid off for a while; and Tanis was incapacitated for a longer time by banging her knee against a stiff rail from a bad

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take-off. Gault learned from these mishaps that the first part of the art of horsemanship is not recklessness of self, but care of the horse. The lesson came to him with diminished force, however, since the state of his purse and the expert advice of St. Clair enabled him quickly to add another hunter to his stable, instead of forcing him to suffer for his sins as a horse-killer.

Among his neighbors, Gault more and more came to be regarded as a regular member of the community, as an individual to be praised or blamed, but not as an outsider to be regarded with suspicion and touchiness; for, however free to criticise your countryman may consider himself, no one so resents criticism from outsiders as he.

Even with Virginia Sanford his good fortune did not desert him. His courtship of her was constant and pleasant as his riding. It was an out-of-door, saddle courtship, rather more in the nature of comradeship than of the romantic love one associates with Virginia; but then the season was winter, and the summer moon, whose beams are the rays of the True Romance, had not yet shone upon them. In April, when the pink and white snow-drifts dotting the landscape indicated orchards, and when, throughout the faintly greening forest, the horizontal flakes

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of the dogwood shimmered, their engagement—a part of the spring—took place, although, following the Southern custom, the outside world was not taken into their confidence.

It cannot be said that Trueman was lifted out of the delirious purgatory of suspense from which some lovers are delivered by their beloved's Yes. He had learned to expect nothing but Yes from life, and had not even a Polycrates fear of too constant good fortune. To neither of them was their love absorbing. They had too many interests, too many pleasures. Their engagement was only the frosting of the cake of living.

X

THERE were those who said St. Clair would not have gone so often to Redfields had Redfields cottage not been in such close proximity to it. St. Clair himself rarely mentioned Mrs. Taylor, though usually he was quite open in his admiration of any girl he fancied.

"I have come for an awakening of my moral sense," he said, one day when he had stopped at Mrs. Taylor's on his way home from Redfields.

"Do you want a rude awakening, or a mild stimulant?" Bessie questioned.

"Which do you think I need?"

"Is either worth while? Your moral nature sleeps so easily. And you don't seem to need it awake. Your tongue is just as persuasive, your manners as charming, your heart as light. Duties and responsibilities never worry you; perplexity has made no wrinkle on your forehead. Really, you have always been a fascinating character to me."

"Not dangerously so."

"Oh no. But I'd like to change natures with

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you for a while. I'd like never to have to decide things, except from the instant desire."

"Go on," St. Clair said. "My moral sense is awakening."

Mrs. Taylor laughed, but did not continue.

"A smile may hide a breaking heart, you know," he added.

"It does not with you. If it did I should not find you so charming. It is the spontaneity of the smile that attracts. One need not go beyond it. It does not hide a broken heart: it hides—" She traced a large cipher in the air with her forefinger.

"I'm not so black as I'm painted," St. Clair said, nettled.

"I don't owe my knowledge of you to gossip, thank you, Mr. Saint. I have painted you baby blue, not black. Conscience must be stirring and making you color-blind."

"Oh, I suppose the cap fits. If I cared nothing for your good opinion, I should not try to defend myself; but I do."

"There is no need of defence. I don't think I misjudge you. Listen! You are honest in money matters—"

"Tolerably."

"Oh, quite. In these matters you make a show of being careless, but that is a pose."

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"You flatter, Miss Bessie."

"You are not a rake, thanks to good taste and aesthetic ideals. But you are— Shall I say it?"

"Yes, please."

"Incorrigibly lazy—except after a fox—and thoroughly irresponsible."

St. Clair walked up and down the room for some seconds. "What do you mean by 'thoroughly irresponsible'?"

"What I say."

"Do you mean that you couldn't trust me?"

"Yes. Not that you would ever take advantage of one's trust, but one could never depend on you in a time of need. Your excuse for not being in place would be gracefully put, no doubt, and have a deceptive ring of truth about it. That wouldn't help the one who depended on you, however."

"Do you really think as little of me as that?"

"I think a great deal of you. I knew another not unlike you, very intimately. Does it not argue that I think a great deal of you for me to refer to him now? He would have risked and given his life for me, and yet I could not trust him. I really hate to say these things to you, for I like you; but this time you invited them, didn't you? It is curious you are not trustworthy, too. You are little influenced by your

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associates. You are quite self-sufficient. You are generous in small things."

"Thank you," St. Clair said, with no touch of irony in his voice.

"And you have been a good friend of mine. Do you know why, with all your good qualities—and they are many—you fail to inspire trust?"

"I think I ought to after what you've said. But let me say something. I know I'm not accomplishing anything; but part of it is due to the easy conditions of life here. Whether I do, or leave undone, a thing seems of so little importance, and I haven't naturally the commercial instinct. If I could accomplish something by some great risk, I would do it; but daily puttering after my niggers, and scheming to make or save a dollar, seems a waste of time. Life is so short, and there are so many pleasant things to do. Hugh Carrington has three big plantations to look after, is in the saddle from sun to sun nearly every day, and what does he get out of life? I suppose he is a rich man, or will be—what of it?"

"You lead me to infer that you are thoroughly satisfied with your life."

"Should I be any better satisfied with the other? I might gain your sympathy—"

"I can sympathize with you already. That is why I speak as I do. I expect you and I began

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life much the same. Do you suppose I thought of such a thing as duty and responsibility when a girl? I was as shallow and pleasure-loving as any girl in Mobile. I fell in love with a nature like my own and like yours, with a handsome face and courteous manners. I am younger than you, but I have lived more—have gone farther. I love to dance to-day, but not as once. The landscape is not so bright as it was, but I can see better in the shadows.”

“I thought yours was the most cheerful disposition in the world.”

“Did you? Then I have triumphed. But for a long time I didn’t. I lost my courage: that was the worst of it. I gave up. I used to cry for days in miserable self-pity. I lost interest in dress; I took no pains to look as well as I could. I wished that I might die. And then Archie was born. After that things were different. I had something to do, a definite duty. There was no one who could do that work for me, and I patched up my courage. That is my work to-day. I have a son to raise to a worthy manhood. I have told you all this—have risked boring you—”

“Miss Bessie!”

“I have said it all because I believe in your better nature. If we don’t put forward our best

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efforts, day by day, for what are we saving our strength? I used to think happiness one's unquestionable birthright. When we find that life is not a succession of pleasant days, we lose something of our youth and its spontaneity of enjoyment, but we gain something, too—an insight and sympathy, an appreciation of things. You are waiting for The Great Occasion. I do not think change often comes out of a clear sky. It may to some: I did not find it so.—Lecture concluded: class dismissed!" she ended, with a swift change of manner.

"And awakening accomplished," he added.

"For a brief hour."

"I am afraid so. My high resolves always seem to lack vitality."

"You will go home and work hard for a week. The week over, looking back on the little done, you will think it really not worth it, and saddle your horse and ride away. It may not last a week, even. You see I am a prophet as well as exhorter."

"Yes, I see," St. Clair answered, absently.

"But some day—"

"Well?"

"I will not prophesy any more. You might sit back and wait for the appointed day."

St. Clair laughed, and rose to go.

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His mother and sister were on the porch as he rode up the sycamore avenue to his own home. A greeting not over-cordial warned him that something was wrong, but his curiosity was not great. Besides, he knew he should hear soon enough. He fanned himself with his hat, sitting on the steps.

"Hullo!" he said, noticing that his mother and sister were dressed for a journey. "Where are you going?"

"Richmond," Harriet answered. "Why doesn't that boy come with the carriage?"

"I suppose he is still driving out the sheep," his mother said.

"Out of the carriage?" St. Clair asked.

"No," Harriet answered, shortly; "out of the garden. They were in all night and this morning. They have eaten it down to the ground."

"Why didn't you drive them out?"

"I don't look after the sheep."

"Won't you see to fixing the fence, Saint?" his mother asked. "Jeff didn't get back till dinner-time."

"Why didn't you send a servant for somebody to get them out and put up the fence, mother?"

"I was reading, dear, and forgot it. I don't know anything about sheep, you know. Hallie, did you pack that gray silk ball-dress with the

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forget-me-not shoulder-straps? I thought I saw it in the closet."

St. Clair strolled around the house into the garden. The sheep had done considerable damage, though there was not the devastation told of by his sister. A negro man was driving the carriage to the house.

"What were you doing away until dinner?" St. Clair demanded.

"Ole Miss sent me for some bacon to the sto', suh."

Two panels of fence propped up with rails showed the mended breach. St. Clair found some baling wire and made the patch more secure. "There are some compensations for having to buy baled hay in the spring," he said to himself. He returned to the house in time to say good-bye. His mother and sister were going down to Richmond for a ball, and they would be gone several weeks.

St. Clair remembered that a dance was to be given that night at River Fork. After supper he had a young mule harnessed to a cart, and putting a mackintosh over his dress clothes, he arrived at the dance when it was in full swing.

XI

HENRY came up when the music stopped, and claimed Miss Sanford for the next dance.

"You're too previous, Henry," St. Clair protested; "you don't come in till after the break. We ought to bar professional beaux from the floor, anyway. Don't you think so, Miss Virginia?"

"You'd better draw the line somewhere else, then, or you'd keep yourself out, if any fair-minded jury sat in judgment. St. Clair is all things to all girls," Henry said to Miss Sanford. "Anything in petticoats appeals to his discerning eye."

"I am the most fastidious of men," St. Clair contradicted. "I am gifted with a sixth sense which enables me to discriminate—"

"He would have you believe that we all stand around and watch him—like they train a hog to hunt truffles—till he has given his approval of a girl, and then we rush up and marry her. If that were so there wouldn't be an old maid on the James."

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"I can rely on your good sense to see the malice animating—"

"My good sense is all you appeal to?" Virginia asked.

St. Clair's eyes were eloquent of denial. "Just give me this one more dance, Miss Virginia," he pleaded, "and I'll—"

"Yes, that's his regular mode of procedure," Henry interrupted. "He has told you already that you danced divinely, hasn't he?"

"I think he said something like that."

"And that your step suited his better than any one else's in the room?"

"Yes, he intimated—"

"This is too cruel!" St. Clair protested. "Henry has this method himself, and he falsely ascribes the same to me."

"It seems to be a good way of reasoning," she answered, demurely.

"But even he has not had time to get to the end already, has he?" Henry continued, unabashed.

"What is the end?" Virginia asked, innocently.

"It isn't to be spoken brazenly in the middle of the hall. Come out on the porch and I'll tell you." Henry led her away.

She cast a backward glance at St. Clair's face,

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with its well-feigned look of desolation: "Third after this," she called.

"If I can exist so long," he answered.

The dance at River Fork had relapsed into a general "twozing" on the porch, a measure of self-preservation rendered necessary by the hot night. Near the door stood Trueman, plainly in ill-humor, following Miss Sanford's figure with his eyes. St. Clair slipped his hand through Gault's arm: "Come and have something," he said. "I've had one or two already, but it's so deucedly warm a man's got to take several to brace himself up. This dancing isn't what we think it is when we first get into long trousers."

Within a convenient distance of the hall—which had been built during the Farmers' Alliance boom, had served at times for church, for theatricals, and for many dances—was a small store in which spirituous liquors were sold. Some attributed the success of the River Fork dances to its proximity. Others laid to its baleful influence the occasional interregnums when no dances were given.

Gault went with St. Clair without protest, although, as a rule, he abstained from drinking at dances. Perhaps his having found Miss Sanford already engaged several times, when he had tried

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to dance with her, and the knowledge that she strongly disapproved of what he was about to do, urged him on. Men are moved to these revenges oftentimes.

"Well, here's to Her—whoever she may be! Have another on the same theme." St. Clair's eyes were shining bright; he was effusively polite to everybody in the saloon. "Coming back with me, True? I've got a dance somewhere along here with Miss Sanford. Wouldn't miss that for anything."

They reached the hall, and St. Clair sought Miss Sanford. "This is mine, I believe," he said. "Henry, you here again?"

Miss Sanford turned to Henry. "I told you he would remember."

"I have lived on memory since our last dance."

"Mr. Henry dared me to tell you yours was the dance just over; but I knew you would not forget which it was."

"Forget! I remember your lightest word." He bore her off from the lawyer, and at the end of the dance resigned her to Carrington under protest. "You know he ought to be at Hill Acres, staying in his sphere, and not competing with us poor fellows who haven't got a wife, Miss Virginia."

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"He won't be a bit modern," Nannie Carrington, outside the group, said, her face flushed from dancing. "He doesn't like to stay behind and mind the baby, while I gallivant around."

"Come on, Miss Nan," her partner urged, "don't let's lose the rest of this two-step. Why don't you leave your husband at home?"

"He *will* come. Yes, I'm rested now."

As conversation gave way to the better employment of dancing, St. Clair and Gault again withdrew to the refreshing seclusion of the saloon. Both were by this time sufficiently affected by what they had taken to be treading on air, although they could yet safely have trodden a chalk-line. In the room was a newcomer, a husky tramp, whose speech as he inquired the "w'y" towards the west betrayed his nationality.

Looking upon all men as his friends, just then, St. Clair raised his glass to the stranger. "The Queen!" he proposed.

The Englishman set down his glass. "None o' that for me," he said, with one of the oaths of the low-bred.

St. Clair walked up to him, a steely glitter in his eyes, his urbanity changed to quick anger. "See here, Mister Man, she's no Queen of mine,

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but she's a lady, and you'll either drink to her or you'll fight."

"I'll fight," the man responded, his blood-shot eyes resting contemptuously on St. Clair's dandified figure.

They went to a near-by barn, followed by a number of men. A lantern, brought by the saloon-keeper, gave a dim light. St. Clair stripped to his underclothes, to save his suit, and the Englishman took off his coat. It was not a fight by rounds, nor would it have been of more than one in any case. The Englishman had forty pounds the advantage in weight, but St. Clair hit him three times for every blow he received, and hit harder. A badly whipped Englishman choked down a drink to the Queen a few minutes later.

St. Clair himself, under the excitement, did not feel any the worse for his encounter, but a careful study of his face, in the dirty little looking-glass the saloon-keeper lent him, convinced him that enough of his antagonist's blows had landed to put his countenance out of keeping with the immaculate attire he was again invested with. He insisted on Gault's returning to the dance, and himself walked down to the small creek near the hall to bathe his face. There he came upon a big figure kneeling on the bank and slapping water into his face.

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"Crikey, but you're quick!" the Englishman said, admiration in his voice, as he recognized St. Clair in the bright moonlight.

"Hullo! Both after the same liniment. How'd you happen to blow in here at this time of night?" St. Clair's good-humor was fully restored.

"Deserted at Newport News. Too bloody strict on a man-o'-war for me. I'm footing it to California." The man got up and wiped his face on his coat-sleeve. "You haven't the price of a dram about you, to wash the one down you made me drink just now?" he asked, with rudimentary humor.

St. Clair laughed and gave him a quarter. Then he walked up and unhitched his mule from the fence around the hall. Henry was outside smoking; he had heard rumors of the fight.

"Not coming back where bright the lamps shine o'er fair women and brave men?" he asked. "Too modest, eh?"

"Do you reckon that if soft eyes looked love, mine could speak again? That bum had the strength of a mule when he did land," the younger man answered. "I'll have to leave you, you old wolf, ravening around the fold to-night."

"You do look rather like a dime-museum freak," Henry said, consolingly.

St. Clair drove to Redfields. It was nearer

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than his own place. He turned his mule loose on the lawn, and sat up in the library until Trueman came, just before sunrise. A piece of beef procured from the refrigerator, tied over St. Clair's eyes by his handkerchief, masked him effectually.

Trueman went to the sideboard in search of a decanter.

"No use, True," St. Clair called. "I've drunk every drop."

"All right," Gault said, taking a chair by the fireplace, the centre of gravity of the room in summer as well as in winter. St. Clair wondered a little at his host's cheerful voice. Gault's mood was not one to be troubled by a little thing like the emptiness of the decanter. St. Clair pulled the bandage from his eyes to get a good look at him. The face gazing aptly into the empty fireplace was radiant. "H'm," thought the onlooker; "must have had better luck towards the end of the dance."

"Life is certainly worth while here, hey Saint?" Gault said, his expression mirrored in his words.

"Sometimes."

"Always! You have been raised here, and don't know how good it is. You haven't any other to compare it with. I was a poor devil of a reporter, never sure what day I should be fired.

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When you did well, it was the policy of our paper to reward you with silence. If you did badly, you heard from them mighty quick. It was bread-and-butter to me, and I had to take what came, and thank you, sir. Nòw, there isn't a man on this earth can harm me by what he says to me. And that's not all. The best of that was artificial, gas-lit. Here is God's green country, and houses are to sleep and eat in, not to work in. They were never meant for that. Man was made for out-doors: to sit on a horse, to ride through His broad sunshine, to smell the up-turned earth. Damn cities and city life! I've got what suits me. It didn't come all at once—I mean my knowing this. It has come slowly. Saint, I believe it would kill me to lose it now. I'd rather lose my life. I couldn't go back to the other now that I've known this. Every rustle of paper on my desk would sing

“‘Carry me back to old Virginia.’

I should hear it in the wind through the telegraph-wires and in the swirl of the trolley-cars.”

Tears were in Gault's eyes at the conjured vision. His voice shook. He got up and walked back and forth. To his hearer the situation seemed strained, melodramatic. “Well, you haven't any creditor threatening to dispossess

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you, have you? You can pay your store account?"

"I am not sure I could turn murderer to keep it," Gault went on; "but I would do almost anything short of that. Yes; I would risk the penitentiary, if I wouldn't the gallows. The very sameness of the days I would not change for any variety I have ever heard of: Uncle Billy bowing and scraping in the morning by my bed; the summer air through the trees, blowing in at the windows; the early haze over the fields and hills;

"The cock's shrill clarion and the echoing horn."

That's the best of all: a good horse and a strong gallop, with the hounds ahead; the gathering for the rise over the fence—"

"And the nasty fall when he turns a somersault. Come to bed, True—or get paper and ink and immortalize yourself."

XII

TO a man in the small hours of the morning, riding home in an exhilarated condition, the swing of his horse, marked by the regular hoof-beats, has the rhythm of a melody. St. Clair readily fitted it to a song. His seat in the saddle was loose but practised. His mind was hazy, and he made no demands upon it except to call up the words of the song. Terry accompanied him a little way, turning off at a cow-path in the woods. Together they had shouted the song at the top of their lungs, and St. Clair continued it in a lower voice after they separated. Gault and the rest of the supper-party were still at Redfields.

A dim moon shadowed the trees upon the road. It had been raining during the day, and the mud and water splashed under the cantering feet. As he came to the end of the song, St. Clair heard faintly, away off in the woods, Terry's voice, off the key, as usual:

“‘I’ll be true to my baby.’”

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St. Clair took it up:

“‘She’s the only one I l-o-v-e.’”

It ended on a high note, and he took breath.

A strip of whitewashed fence coming in sight, checked the beginning of another verse. Instinct forbade noise before a lady’s house. Had his senses been alert, he might have seen a light in an upper window of Redfields cottage. His horse shied suddenly with a snort. St. Clair kicked him in the ribs and jerked at the bit in angry displeasure. He saw nothing of the figure flying down the path.

A voice called him breathlessly, “Oh, Saint!”

He heard only a vague sound, and kicked his horse again.

The gate slammed, and the voice, nearer, called again, “Saint!”

His horse stopped. Unconsciously he had pulled the reins at hearing his name. He opened and shut his eyes. A figure stood in the moonlight by him, and was calling his name, her hands stretched towards his bridle. Why did everything waver so? The head seemed familiar in the moonlight. What a curious adventure. His eyes now made out that the figure was smaller than he had thought. It was evidently a woman. He pulled off his cap.

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But the sound that now came to him was unmistakable, and the words this time burned themselves into his brain—a woman sobbing, and the cry, “In the time of my greatest need—drunk!”

He shifted his weight in the saddle and tried to dismount. If any sacrifice could then have made him sober, he would not have hesitated at it; but neither shame nor self-contempt could clear his sluggish brain. He felt that to get off his horse would be to fall in the road. He swayed forward and caught himself on his horse's neck. The gay humor with which he had left Redfields, his joy of living, his very manhood seemed lost to him.

Mrs. Taylor came to his side. He did not dare look into her brown eyes. “Listen,” she said. “Some men can ride, drunk or sober. Can you?”

He muttered “Yes.”

“Archie is very sick,” she said, in an even voice, “and I have no one to send. Can you get Dr. Peters? Do you understand me?”

“Yes,” he answered again, thickly.

“Turn off by Redfields and take the river road.”

“I know,” he said.

“Go. Let shame keep you in the saddle. If you fail me, I shall never forgive you.” Her

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voice broke. "Oh, to have to depend on a man like you to-night!"

St. Clair turned his horse and galloped back.

St. Clair was riding his favorite horse, and, as so often happens, the sense of the importance of the rider's mission was in some way communicated to the horse. There were no longer any playful shies from patches of moonlight, no coquettish prancings over puddles. Roanoke swung along swiftly, with the precision of a machine, loose-reined, head outstretched, eyes alert. St. Clair was a good rider. Habit of balance kept him in his seat. His mind was a blank save for the one idea that possessed it. "Right-hand turn," he kept repeating to himself, straining his eyes, as he opened and closed the lids, and trying to hold up his unsteady head. By meadows and pastures, and through strips of woods he searched for the familiar turn. His memory could not aid him in placing it. He must see it to recognize it. In the woods he came to a clearing and a wagon-track. He hesitated for a moment to collect himself and concentrate his faculties on the decision.

"No! Wood road. Go on, Roanoke."

The clouds were thickening in the sky, and every now and then the moon was obscured.

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"If it will only last a little longer," he muttered.

He found the turn and laid the rein against the horse's neck. Of distance he had no conception. He could not remember how far it was to the doctor's gate. He knew it was beyond Cartersbrook—beyond Hill Acres. He must pass their gates before looking for it. His horse kept on steadily, splashing through the puddles and over the muddy spots without a slip. St. Clair shut his eyes through sheer inability to keep them open continuously. He opened them to find himself flying by a gate. What gate? Was it Cartersbrook? Yes, the little depot near by told him that. Next, Hill Acres. Then Dr. Peters. He breathed a sigh of relief and struggled again with his eyes, rubbing them until they ached. Curious roaring sounds came to his ears, but his brain refused to interpret them. His horse raised his head, then stopped, thrusting his forefeet in front of him and sliding along in the mud. St. Clair fell flat on the animal's neck, but pushed himself back into the saddle. Neither the horse's fear nor the roaring water at his feet made any impression on St. Clair. His "Go on!" was seconded by a spur-thrust, and the horse reared and then bounded forward. "Little Bird Creek," St. Clair thought, as the water wet his feet.

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"Must be high," as he felt his leg pressed against the horse's side by the current. The water rose to his saddle, and, an instant later, the man was swept off the horse and away, in his hand a wisp of hair from the mane he had instinctively seized. With the shock of the cold water the film left his eyes, and his brain became more active. It was impossible to make any head-way against the current, but he managed to keep his head up, and worked his way towards the opposite bank.

Swiftly the rushing torrent carried him on, the moon now shining peacefully above him. Several times he neared the bank, when an adverse current around a bend swept him back into the centre of the stream. He was bruised against projecting roots of trees, but not really hurt. At last a chance eddy swept him to the bank; he seized a bough hanging down over his head and pulled himself up on land.

"Poor Roanoke!" he thought, as he started off through the woods. In a little while he came to a fence and climbed over it into the high-road, surprised to find what utter weariness followed on his few minutes in the creek. He stood still, trying in the deceptive moonlight to make out where he was. He heard a horseman coming from the right, and staggered towards him.

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"Hold on there!" shouted a familiar voice, as the horse was reined back.

"Hugh!" St. Clair cried. He seized the frightened horse by the bridle and steadied himself on his shaking legs.

"What the devil—Bob St. Clair! What has happened?"

"Give me your horse—I was swept away—Miss Bessie. I lost Roanoke in the branch. It's way out of its banks. Oh! give me your horse. Where is Dr. Peters' gate?"

"It's half a mile back. You must be pretty well mixed up. Who's sick? Miss Bessie? Hadn't I better go?"

"No! Archie's sick."

Carrington dismounted, and held the off stirrup while St. Clair pulled himself on the horse. He reeled in the saddle, and Carrington held on to the horse's bridle. "You can hardly sit in the saddle. Let *me* go, Saint."

"Turn him loose, Hugh," cried St. Clair.

"I won't turn him loose. You will fall off. Your face is covered with blood. Be reasonable, man."

"Oh, let me go," pleaded St. Clair. "It's for Miss Bessie. Don't let me fail her now."

"Go on, then," Hugh answered, taking his hand from the rein.

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St. Clair galloped away, swaying from side to side with weakness. The doctor's gate was open. He could not dismount at the porch: a stiffness and numbness had paralyzed his muscles. He pushed himself from the saddle until he lost his balance and fell to the ground.

The doctor was a light sleeper, and came out with a lantern while St. Clair was yet trying to get upon his feet. St. Clair told his story.

"Let me fix you up first," Dr. Peters said.

"No. Take this horse. If you lose a moment, I'll shoot you."

"What will you shoot me with, you ragged tramp?" laughed the doctor. "Here, you fiery dead man, put yourself in my bed. Creek up, is it? Well, I must go the other way."

St. Clair's eyes opened next day upon Henry's handsome gray head.

"I heard that you were laid up here, and thought I'd take a look at you. Found Roanoke grazing by the road-side this morning, and thought something was up. He'd rolled and broken the tree of your saddle. You ought to learn to ride, man. Been trying the cold-water cure for inebriety, have you?"

St. Clair pulled one bandaged hand from under the bedclothes and eyed it. "I seem to

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be bandaged up like a race-horse. What's the matter?"

"I believe you are black and blue all over—but you ought to know best. What infernal folly ever made you cross a creek fifty yards out of its bed?"

"I never did believe in letting a little thing stop me," St. Clair said, with a grin.

"Well, when you get beyond spoon victuals, come over to Chinquapin and pay me a visit."

"Thanks, I must go home to-day. Why, I can't get up, Henry. I'm weak as a kitten. This is the most curious thing." He laughed, nervously. "I feel shaky and fluttery and hystericky. I've got an engagement to ride with Miss Sanford this evening, an hour before sundown. Send her word I'm laid up with small-pox or something respectable, will you? For Heaven's sake, don't say I rode into Little Bird after a rain. You'll tell a good lie, won't you, Henry? Your professional services I am bespeaking. And write a note to True not to buy that horse from Jones. Tell him I say so. If he were as big a fool about cards as he is about horses, those fellows would have owned Redfields long ago."

St. Clair stopped speaking, his head swimming from the exertion.

XIII

IN exuberance of good-will towards all the world, Trueman wrote up to Kearns on the *Planet*, inviting him to come down and make him a long visit. It was almost the first time his mind had turned to the other world wherein New York bustled, except to send North for some riding-clothes. After a delay of a week an answer came. To Kearns, as well as to Gault, Deliverance Day had come. He wrote that he had left the paper, "actually left, not been fired," and was now an expert accountant and a handwriting shark. He accepted Gault's invitation, and would come down as soon as the celebrated Hufeisen murder trial, on which he was growing rich, testifying, should be at an end.

Kearns arrived when the summer had fully settled on the country. Gault met him at the Cartersbrook station, cool-looking, if not so cool as he looked, in white duck coat and breeches and pigskin putties.

"Hullo! How disgustingly fat you look!"

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Kearns called. "No lines of thought on your brow."

"You *do* look a little peaked," Gault replied. "Are all you city fellows as bleached out as that? I've forgotten."

They climbed into the dayton, and trotted rapidly off, Kearns's trunk bouncing about behind. The New-Yorker kept one hand on the railing of the seat, and when they drove down into Little Bird Creek he protested, feebly, "You haven't a very strong good-roads movement here, have you?"

"Oh, these roads are all right. Plenty good enough for the likes of you," Trueman answered, cheerily.

"Well!" Kearns gasped, nervously; "I didn't know my worst enemy had such a poor opinion of me as that. Don't you often tip over?" Like many inexperienced ones, he did not know how far a carriage could tilt up without actually going over.

Gault was surprised to find in his heart a resentment of his friend's criticism of the roads, in spite of his knowledge of the truth of the arraignment. He was still casting about in his mind for a suitable rejoinder when he caught sight of St. Clair on his horse far down the road.

"There's a man I want to speak to," he said,

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and slapped the reins on his horses' backs with an encouraging chirp. The horses broke into a gallop and the dayton swayed and bumped behind them. It was a trick Trueman had learned from St. Clair, who often started late and arrived on time, when so minded; and, grinning to himself, Trueman recognized it as the best counter to Kearns's thrust at the roads.

"Come around to supper, can't you?" Gault said, when they had caught up with St. Clair. "I want Kearns, here, to see some untamed Virginians."

"Can't do it to -night, old man. I'm going with Henry to call on your beauteous friend, Miss Sanford. Henry says he's going to court her himself, but I shall make him extend himself to win. Expect I'll go back to Chinquapin for the night with Henry. I can come over in a few days, if you like—corn ploughed the first time, and oats not ready to cut yet—I'm a man of leisure."

"It isn't Colonel Sanford, the railroad man, by any chance? I read he'd gone South," Kearns asked, after the Virginian had been left behind.

"That's the man."

"You seem to have all kinds of swells here. I thought I was coming down into the wilds. I got to know Colonel Sanford's butler quite well, the

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time they talked of his road buying up the Pochontas mines. In fact, I think I had a larger acquaintance among the footmen of millionaires than any other reporter in New York." Kearns spoke with a touch of his old-time bitterness.

"Well, we'll try to hide your disgraceful past," his host said, soothingly. "And I'll do my best, too, to keep them from finding out that you've sunk still lower now, into a handwriting expert."

After supper Trueman suggested going over to the Sanfords'. "We might as well go over and watch the race between Henry and Saint," he said; "they're both pretty good at a sprint."

Colonel Sanford came in from an interview with his overseer after they arrived.

"Hullo, farmer!" he said to Trueman. "Wish I could learn the trick of making money out of the soil. I've owned this place ever since my father died, and every year it has been a bill of expense. There was a terrible drought once, and my manager persuaded me that, if I would buy the place next mine for pasture, all my troubles would cease. I bought it, and now the whole costs me just half as much again as before."

"Perhaps you couldn't run your railroad from Virginia any better than you can manage your farm from New York," Henry suggested.

"There may be something in that; but why

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can't I get a capable manager? I don't find any trouble doing it in business."

"In business they don't fight under straight Marquis of Queensberry rules. Every good farmer would rather run a farm of his own. That isn't so simple in business."

Colonel Sanford grinned good-naturedly. "Can't be a farmers' trust, eh? Well, I'm glad of it. If I ever get broke, I shall come straight down here and see how much of my early training remains with me. I'd like to bet you I could make a good living out of this place even now."

"I believe," said Miss Sanford, "father came down here this summer because he thought if he once cast his own individual eye over the place, for a few months, it would blossom out into a dividend-paying thing."

The first few days of his visit Kearns was kept busy trying vainly to reconcile the Virginia he found with his preconceived idea of it. He missed the *ante-bellum* flavor he had expected. True, here was the house of those historic days; here were the offices, the outbuildings, the quarters, and the big bell. Working in the field were the negroes, and on horseback among them was Gault, in a broad hat.

Kearns came from the river cornfield, where he

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had felt such stifling heat as he had believed existed only in the stoke-hole of a steamer. He stretched himself back in a deck-chair under the trees, stirred draughts of air with a big fan, and waited for the brazen sun to go down. St. Clair, in another chair, with his hat over his eyes, smoked serenely, unconscious that his modernity and good clothes were another slap at Kearns's book-Virginia. No chance acquaintance had yet referred to the war. No negro had he heard say "massa." Once, before a group of men, Kearns had deprecatingly referred to the assault of Senator Sprouse, of South Carolina, on Senator Purdy, also of South Carolina, as hurting the South. "He don't hurt the South," Henry had drawled, in response. "Hurts his State, if he hurts anything. Nobody here cares what they do. Knew they'd be pulled apart when he made his bluff. Mighty careful not to fight down here, where they had a whole State to fight in and nobody to separate 'em."

Kearns was thinking over this conversation, and of how ill it accorded with his previous ideas of the solidity of the South, when Gault rode through the gate and up the lawn at a drooping walk, unsaddled and unbridled his horse, and turned him loose to graze.

"Hot?" said St. Clair.

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"Hot?" answered Gault. "I've been hot before. This is something else. I'm burned up inside so that I rattle."

"Better keep out of the cornfield, then," St. Clair answered, yawning.

"There's Uncle Billy. I suppose supper is ready. It's too hot to eat."

"Never!" cried St. Clair, springing up. He had arrived at Redfields during the hot spell, and had as yet not summoned energy enough to leave it. It was too hot in the daytime, and the evenings slipped away in luxurious idleness.

In the cool shade of the dining-room even Trueman revived a little. A big pitcher of buttermilk, which had set all day in the running water of the spring-house, refreshed the host and the New-Yorker. The Virginian made a grimace of refusal when it was offered him. A little darky waved a locust bough over the table to drive away chance flies, listening intently to the conversation the while.

Gault looked over the eatables with some pride. "Everything here came off the place," he said to Kearns. "Ham, chicken, lettuce, asparagus, strawberries, pickles, light-bread, sally-lunn, and butter. Oh, the sugar and salt and coffee didn't, but you can have sorghum instead of sugar if you want to be more strictly home-made. See here,

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boy, don't you dip that bough into the butter again, you hear me!"

"Yas 'r," the little boy answered, in confusion, closing his mouth, which had been listening as well as his ears, and beginning to fan again violently.

"Speaking of eating, did you know that Delmonico had given up his down-town restaurant?" Kearns asked.

"Really? Take a hot biscuit. That one you've got is cold."

Kearns obediently ranged another one beside the three which had already been superseded by hotter ones. "When shall you be up in New York?" he asked.

"Oh, I don't know," Gault answered, vaguely. "I'd go next fall, only I'd lose so much fox-hunting. Perhaps, if a bad spell of weather comes on, I may run up for a few days. Do you know, it is hard for me to realize that New York is still doing business at the old stand. It seems a thousand miles away, or a million, as far as my interests go. I can't believe that I have lived there all my life."

"You'll get over that after you've been here longer," St. Clair put in. "I have to go to some city once a year, if it leaves me footback when I return."

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"It doesn't seem to me as if I ever should want to see the city again," Gault answered. "Any one that wants the city can have it. Let 'em stay there: they're welcome. This here is good enough for me."

After supper they went out on the terrace into the long twilight.

"Do you care enough for the outer world to take a newspaper?" the New-Yorker asked.

"Yes, indeed. Couldn't get along without the *Sun*. I'm still newspaper man enough for that. Oh! Uncle Billy," he called, "bring me the paper."

"Yas 'r," came through the open dining-room window, and presently Billy brought out four newspapers, all still in their wrappers.

"It does look as if you couldn't get along without your paper," Kearns said, sarcastically. "The Boer war might have ended, and you'd never know it."

Gradually the darkness sank upon them. It was the softest of summer nights. A little breeze swept by; fitful glow-lights shone from the ends of their cigarettes; and the stars, seen intermittently through the trees, discovered the three lolling figures in easy-chairs, their feet on the railing.

St. Clair yawned and shook himself. "I must be off," he said.

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"Would it be impertinent if one guessed the direction?" Gault asked.

"Help yourself; but it's no secret. I've got Henry on the run.

"My love is like a red, red rose."

He strolled away through the house, singing, and a little later they heard his horse walking down the road.

"He doesn't seem in any hurry," Kearns said.

"Oh, he usually rides at a walk," Gault answered. "But he's rushing Miss Sanford enough."

Kearns laughed. "Got you on the run, too, has he? He isn't a bit the kind of Virginian I expected to see."

"Why not?" Gault repressed the annoyance which the first part of Kearns's speech caused him.

"Why, he's like any swell with plenty of money and nothing to do."

"I never heard he was burdened with money," Gault said.

"But his clothes, his horse, his manner—a thousand signs," Kearns said, sceptically.

"They don't prove anything."

"What does he do?"

"Do?" questioned Gault. "How do you mean?"

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"Why, work at?"

"He's a farmer, like me and Henry and Car-
rington and the rest."

"Oh, a gentleman-farmer."

"No, not a gentleman-farmer—a gentleman
and a farmer."

"Any difference?" Kearns asked, with a grin.

"World-wide difference. He is a gentleman
first, and he cultivates, for profit, land. A gen-
tleman-farmer is one who performs all kinds of
fool agricultural experiments to amuse himself;
and is, or is not, a gentleman as it happens. To
farm for amusement doesn't make one a gentle-
man, it makes one a gentleman-farmer — quite
another thing. Savvy?"

After a long pause, Kearns asked, suddenly:
"Where does all this lead to, Gault—this life,
you know?"

"Lead to? It doesn't lead anywhere that I
know of. Who wants it to lead anywhere? This
is God's country; plenty good enough to stay
here."

"But ambition, and that sort of thing? Seems
to me I used to hear you in New York prattling
about writing the Great American Novel."

"Oh, I've got half a trunkful of manuscript
yet; but I haven't had time to fool with it since
I've been here. I probably never shall. Ambi-

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tion," Gault mused; "I have ambitions enough. I want to ride and dance as well as St. Clair; I want to farm as well as Carrington; and I should like to be able to pay a compliment to a sixty-year-old lady as gallantly as Henry. I have already achieved the ability to live as joyously as any Virginian. What else should I fret about? Can you show me any state of existence to beat this, here, to-night?"

"I—I don't believe I can."

"By-the-way, what was the news in that forgery trial you were telling me about?" Gault asked.

"I forgot to look," his guest admitted, sheepishly. "I guess I'd be as bad as you if I stayed here a month. But I suppose the paper will keep till to-morrow."

"Yes," Gault answered, indifferently, "unless Uncle Billy uses it to kindle the kitchen fire."

"Any danger of that?"

"I think it extremely probable, if it is lying around. He can't read, so dates are nothing to him, though he pretends to, and expounds voluminously from the Bible. One day I came across him intently studying an old number of the *Herald*. He was looking at the picture of a yacht-race, and held the paper wrong side up. 'What's the news, Uncle Billy?' I asked. 'Well,

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sah, I ain' done read it thu yet,' he answered, solemn as an owl, 'but they's been terrible 'struc-tion on the ocean. All the ships is upperside down.'"

Kearns had made one or two half-hearted attempts to summon the energy to go in and read the paper, but he kept putting it off, in the pure, sensuous enjoyment of the night's beauty, with its far-off piping of frogs and tree-toads, and the rustle of the sheep biting the short grass of the lawn, and the silvery tinkle of the bell on the wether.

"If one is supremely content with just living—if life is worth the simple living of it—what do other things matter?" Gault asked.

"It must be in the air," Kearns assented. "I'm staying out at Richmond Hill for the summer, and it is nearly as quiet as here; but I can't enjoy mere sitting still there as I can here. By-the-way, I think I met your uncle there once at a Mrs. Cheney's. But, as I was saying, there I'd have a lamp out on the little, screened porch, and be reading this paper instead of secretly hoping that Uncle Billy will find it 'lying 'round' and burn it up."

"That's the beauty of the South; you can enjoy plain, spontaneous resting here so well. Up North you have to get tired first, and that takes half the zest out of it."

XIV

TRUEMAN had expansively invited Kearns to stay as long as he could—all summer, if possible; but he soon began to find his company irksome. While the two had been pretty good friends on the *Planet*, they were not so congenial at Redfields. Summer friendships are notoriously unsuited for winter continuation, and it is equally true that city friendships often fail in the country. Men touch one another in their sympathies on one or two points only, as a rule, and, when their environment alters, they often lose their points of sympathy. To this, rather than to the inherent baseness of human nature, is due the falling off of friends from one who is obliged to alter his tastes, or the gratification of them, through poverty.

A slight lack of breeding in Kearns, which Gault had hardly noticed amid the surroundings of the *Planet* office, now jarred on him in his home, and especially in their intercourse with their neighbors. Perhaps this might not have been so much noticed had Kearns had sufficient

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tact to prefer staying at home when Trueman went to call on Miss Sanford. At any rate, it was with a feeling of relief that Gault drove his guest to the station at the end of his visit, and his hope to see him again in Virginia was expressed with considerable vagueness as to the time.

There were few backward glances for Gault in his new life. Kearns's appeal to his old literary ambition had fallen flat on his ears. He had even ceased to reflect on the chance wave in the current of human affairs which had thrown him up on this previously unknown shore, overflowing with milk and honey. The novelty of possession had ceased to thrill, but pride and vast contentment had followed its departure. He had made friends; he had found opportunities to extend his hospitality to his new neighbors; he had settled into their life as a part of it.

His cigars, smoked on the east terrace in the evening, had a fragrance independent of the bouquet of the brand, especially after Kearns had ended his visit. He did not have to battle with the problem of obtaining pleasure, and he often remembered with amusement the misgivings he had expressed to Henry on that point. Of late, like the lawyer, he had been hard put to find time for work. Corn was planted and worked; oats were reaped and later threshed; hay was cut and

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put into barns and stacks, with only the most cursory oversight from him. The morning bell often rang while he slept; for he was away so often that he had given the overseer orders to attend to that. He could not find time for all these things. A drive to town or to any of the neighbors within a radius of twenty miles; the meeting with some chance friends; a little gossip and pleasant afternoons beneath broad shade-trees, and the day was done. A long night drive to a dance; a few hours with those whom the county paper never tired of alluding to as the beauty and chivalry of Virginia; the bright ante-dawn stars as he scrambled into his buckboard for the drive home, and the night had followed the day.

He was enjoying rather more than usual, one afternoon, a combination of good things in which the vivid green landscape after a rain, and his cigar, and the peace of soul following a good dinner held high places. St. Clair, lying in a deck-chair, pipe in mouth, called his attention to a rift of smoke ascending slowly heavenward from a grove of trees half a mile away, instancing it in support of his prophecy for good weather.

"It's from Mrs. Taylor's house. How does she happen to own a slice of two hundred acres right in the middle of the place?" Trueman asked.

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"Old Mr. Gault gave it to Archie Taylor—his step-son, you know."

"He was rather a thorn in my uncle's side, wasn't he? But for that, I suppose, his widow might have been here now—and I back at the old stand in New York, working for a five-dollar raise."

St. Clair looked up quickly. "See here, True," he said, after a slight pause, "I've eaten your bread and salt, and your meat, too, and I have no wish to be disagreeable; but if this is a pose, it is hardly worth while to put it on before me."

"Is what a pose?"

"Do you mean to say that what you have just said about Mrs. Taylor's not being here is all you know?"

"Yes." Something in St. Clair's voice made Gault uneasy. "What else is there to know?"

"Do you mean that no hint has come to you—no nigger has told you—"

"What?" said Gault; "told me what?"

"Look here, True, I wouldn't have begun this if I had known; but I might as well finish now. General Gault intended to leave the whole property to Miss Bessie, but, as you know, he was killed, and no will was ever found."

A coldness came over Trueman, as if he, who had thought himself king, had suddenly discov-

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ered himself outcast. His eyes searched St. Clair's face for more news, and his fingers gripped the arm of his chair. Then the shock passed away in a measure. He felt the bruise of the wood on his fingers. His eyes wandered over the lawn in front of him, with its series of hurdles and jumps.

"It is not so bad as it might be," St. Clair went on. "Every effort was made to find a will. Mr. Henry sent to every place in New York where General Gault had been, to see if he had left it anywhere. I doubt if it ever was made."

Trueman's mind harked back irresistibly to the past, which had seemed so remote that it might almost have been in another incarnation. Only a few short months ago there were the hall bedroom; the utter lack of home-life; the discontent inseparable from the profession which leads to nothing; the alternate kindness and injustice of the city editor; the work so often uncongenial; the lack of real friendships: his life then — and now.

"Will or no will," he cried, "by God! it is mine now, and I will fight for it as long as I breathe."

St. Clair nodded.

"Fight!" said Gault, more evenly; "I will fight for it as that old fellow did in Kentucky; I will fight for it with shot-guns from my porch."

Gault's fire was a revelation, even to himself.

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Never had he felt this passion for possession before.

"Well, don't let's tilt at wind-mills," St. Clair said. "It's time for a drink."

By questioning St. Clair again, and later in an interview with lawyer Henry, he learned all there was to know: that General Gault had had one will drawn up leaving Redfields to Archie; had then changed his mind and ordered another, which Henry had written out and sent to him just before his departure for New York; and then that General Gault, with easy Southern procrastination, had carried both North with him, intending to sign one there. After his death neither of these wills had been found. Messrs. Weed & Funkhauser had examined all the baggage in his room at the hotel where he had stopped, and had sent a confidential clerk to Richmond Hill, where he had visited the Cheneys; but the latter declared that General Gault had only spent the night with them and had carried away his valise when he went—the valise which was found intact in the wreck that had killed him.

"I think you need have no fear of losing your estate," Henry said, kindly, to Trueman Gault, after giving him all these details. "We did every possible thing to find the will General Gault in-

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tended signing. As a friend of Miss Bessie's, of course, I am sorry not to see her inherit Redfields; although I should be sorry to see you leave Virginia, now that you have made it your home and us your friends."

Henry's manner was thoroughly courteous and sincere; but, in spite of it, Gault could not help being a little hurt at the plainly secondary position he occupied to Mrs. Taylor.

As the days passed, the dread of losing Redfields, at first strong within him, wore away, but left a soreness behind which his increasing sense of security did not lessen. St. Clair, no more than Henry, could honestly give him the sympathy he desired. "I wouldn't bother about it, old man; it's probably all for the best," St. Clair said, once, when the subject came up; adding, with a twinkle of the eyes, "I might have courted Miss Bessie for her money, if she had had any; and if she'd taken me, she'd have had her second worthless husband—which is more than any one woman's share."

XV

THE right and the wrong of his possession of Redfields would not stay out of Trueman's mind. He had plunged into the amusements of the county with greater enthusiasm than ever before. He gave two bachelor dinners, and led the revelry to such good purpose that the memory of his uncle's intentions and of everything else quite vanished from his mind — until the next morning. He became as indefatigable a pleasure-seeker as St. Clair in his most irresponsible mood. But he found that one used to riding could do a great amount of unpleasant thinking on horseback; and frazzling out one's nerves with two or three dances a week, and night-long rides to them and back, was not the best preparation for facing intricate questions of the conscience.

Gault fancied he detected signs of sympathy with Mrs. Taylor, and of hostility to himself, in many of his neighbors. The most casual reference to her seemed to him pregnant with allusion to the Redfields inheritance. He lost much

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of the jovial good-humor and content with life that had helped to win him popularity. His life began to wear a barren aspect; for in trying to escape from his conscience he deserted his most valuable ally, work, and relied on what is ever a poor *pièce de résistance*—pleasure.

Sometimes an unexpected turn is given the current of our thoughts by a sharp contrast which arrests us. Gault, riding up the lane and turning in at the stone-and-brick pillars with their iron gates, which guarded the Redfields lawn, carried with him a vivid memory, only a few minutes old, of the little white house with its rock chimneys, wherein Mrs. Taylor lived. In front of it lay the strip of yard, within the whitewashed fence, and beyond the house the collection of small buildings of the meagre establishment. Condemned to the limits of this narrow horizon was a young woman of distinction of manner and of a beauty which not only captivated the eye, but subtly took hold of the heart. And her horizon to-day was broader than it would be to-morrow. Each day the petty details of living as she must, the thought for small economies, would narrow her. Her beauty would fade in the struggle to make both ends meet on a small farm. Her sympathies must inevitably contract. In ten years how

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much of her charm would remain? Did she realize it? He thought she did not. If she did, there was no hint of the oppression of a hopeless future in her face. Her eyes were bright, if a little wistful; but then the shock of her recent loss would account for that.

The sight of his own house of red brick and white columns across the lawn, the dignity of the Redfields house with its wide-open door leading into a hall into which one might well drive the coach-and-four that rumor credited some dare-devil of the past with having done, appealed to him with crushing force. His own bountiful prosperity arose and smote him. The contrast was too great. Mrs. Taylor must not be suffered to remain as she was; there was enough for both: he would make it his care to change her lot. In the days to come, when Virginia would be mistress of Redfields, Bessie Taylor must make it her home again. He would stand in old General Gault's place to her and to Archie. They should be wards of the estate.

With the pursuit of each detail of her future the joy of life came back to Gault. He turned his horse and rode back down the lane. As he neared the whitewashed strip of fence a little boy, in his play, ran across the porch, stumbled, and fell down the steps upon the stones

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bordering the flower-bed. It looked like a bad fall. Gault was off his horse in an instant, threw the reins over a post, and vaulted the fence. The child scrambled to his feet, stood for a moment dazed, not knowing whether to cry or not. The blood flowing from his hand settled it, and he burst into a loud wail.

Trueman was urging him not to cry, assuring him, with a man's tact, that he was not hurt, when a woman's voice interposed.

"Archie, the head of the house must not cry. Don't you see you have a visitor?"

The outcry ceased at once, though Archie's polite how-de-do was muffled by sniffles and unborn sobs, and he retired into his mother's skirt and wiped the bruised hand and still-flowing eyes on her apron.

In a big sunbonnet and checked apron was the once heiress-presumptive of Redfields. Trueman was surprised to find how much pleasanter he felt towards her to-day than he had. Of late he had almost grudged her the air of distinction her simple dress could not hide; the fair hair, with its unusual accompaniment of brown eyes, had seemed to him meretricious; her black attire—was it not a means of setting off her fairness? Even her simplicity of manner and perfect friendliness towards him—were they not affected

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and studied? Suspicion and all uncharitableness had been in his heart towards her, almost without his knowing it.

Trueman accepted her invitation to come in, and went around with her to the back porch, where five little colored girls, varying in ages from eight to fifteen, were sewing. Shyness and busy needles followed his appearance among them.

"These are my teamster's children, making their summer dresses. They have no mother, and I am trying to give them a few ideas on the proper decoration of the human form divine. An exact fit isn't required in every grade of society. I cut things mostly by my eye. Bertha, you are not basting, remember."

"Yas 'm," sighed Bertha, shortening her stitches.

"Now you may all run away," the preceptress said a few minutes later; "and, Patty, pull the bell for the hands, please. Of course, you will stay to luncheon," she added to Gault.

"Thank you."

"You will have to forgive me," she said, as they sat down to table, "if my attention seems a little divided sometimes. It's really thought for you; because my cook has gone away, and I am making out with Aunt Martha, who, if she has

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any talents in cooking, keeps them securely rolled in a napkin. I think I shall try to ride out and find one this afternoon, though I'm mighty busy."

"Let me go," Gault offered, eagerly. He had found planning to do things for Mrs. Taylor much easier than doing them, when brought face to face with her simple independence, and he welcomed this small chance. "I haven't a thing on earth to do. Or I'll send you down mine."

"Oh, dear, no! I couldn't think of taking poor Aunt Susan away from Redfields. She's never cooked anywhere else, from slave days—I believe it would kill her. And I don't believe she'd come."

"Then, at least, let me find you another. I just feel the need of a good, long ride." One would have thought from his tone that he was pleading for something he very much desired himself, and, in truth, it was his conscience clamoring for some small opiate.

"Well, if you think you can find your way down to the Free Union settlement—?" She stopped doubtfully.

"Of course I can. We rode through it once last winter, fox-hunting, though I haven't an idea how we got there."

"It is quite simple," she said, demurely. "You

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take that road back into the Flatwoods that turns off by Major Hudson's. About two miles up that there's a big old field pine, and kind of a wood-road turns off from that. You follow that until you come to a branch; cross that, and then take down some draw-bars you'll see to your right in a barbed-wire fence. Then it's perfectly plain sailing. Just go on till you come to a nigger church, and half a mile beyond that is the settlement. I don't know whom you can get. Abraham Lincoln Faust's wife might come if her husband isn't feeling cranky just now. If you can't get her, you'll just have to inquire 'round."

Trueman started off cook-hunting with more pleasure than he had felt for some time. His good-will towards Mrs. Taylor grew with the indulgence of it. He decided he would talk it all over with Virginia, and enlist her interest in his plans. Hitherto he had said no word to her of this matter which had troubled him so greatly. But now they could discuss it and see how best to do it. His mind went far ahead in the elaboration of his scheme, bound up as it was with his own bright future. Perhaps, after the novelty of living at the South had somewhat worn off, he and Virginia would decide to spend part of the winter in New York, or travelling in Europe, or fox-hunting in the Genesee valley. Red-

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fields might become more Mrs. Taylor's home than it was his own. He would be away a great deal—perhaps most of the time. She should rule in his absence, with no directions from him. It pleased Gault to fancy himself head of a household containing different lines and branches of the family, living together—and Redfields was big enough for many families.

The search for the cook proved arduous enough to tax Gault's perseverance and persuasion to the utmost. It was night when finally he secured the promise of a negro woman to come to Mrs. Taylor's, and it was one of those promises whose source it is impossible to ascertain—whether it sprang from the intention of performance or from the African desire to acquiesce in whatever is suggested to it by the white.

With the darkness came a fine, drizzling rain, which shortly turned the clay roads into the greasiest of footings, and gave the darkness that quality which renders eyesight nearly useless. In the first part of the long ride Trueman was sustained by the consciousness of a worthy act nobly performed. Then, under the depression of bodily discomfort and the tedium of crawling slowly along the slippery, unknown road, the reverse of the picture he had conjured up in the afternoon presented itself to him. What was all

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this that he proposed doing for Mrs. Taylor but a sorry cozening of his conscience? Had he ever entertained any philanthropic schemes for her before he had learned that by right the whole property should be hers? Was he not doling out alms to her from what was entirely hers? If he was the kind-hearted philanthropist he tried to make himself believe he was, why had he not thought of all this before? And if it were only feloniously compounding with his conscience, would conscience be stilled by any such barefaced pretence? Would not her very presence and acceptance of his favors be a continual reproach—a reminder that he was giving back a small quarter-loaf of the bread that was all hers?

And then, would she take any such dole from him? When the idea first came to him on his lawn, it had seemed very simple to say, "Here, my poor connection, take this trifle and be happy, and glorify my name." When he had come face to face with her, in her house, the simplicity of the proceeding had all vanished. To offer to go for a cook had been the extent that his courage had carried him.

It was hard for Trueman to reason the matter out quite fairly to himself. Perhaps, if he had consulted Virginia Sanford at this stage, or some other clear-headed person who could have taken

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an impartial view of the matter, it would have helped him out of his trouble. But this was exactly what he would not do. He felt that he must fight the matter out with himself—and not yet, for an instant, had he admitted the possibility of his giving up the whole place to old General Gault's step-son's wife. A dogged resolution not to give up an acre of Redfields was his last thought that night before he went to sleep.

XVI

SUMMER is the time when Virginia affords its fill of pleasure. To be sure, this runs mostly in the way of dances, but they are given variety by being held under all sorts of circumstances in all parts of the country. There were regular dances at Eastover, and at the River Fork hall—and this co-operative method of entertainment, entailing no especial expense on any one person, in a community where not many could afford much expense, found favor with the majority; but there were also parties at Hill Acres and at other private houses, and at the beginning of fall occurred Mr. Henry's long-projected house-warming at Chinquapin. At this Mrs. Taylor, for the first time since General Gault's death, received, and danced with her old-time grace and enjoyment; and Mrs. Nannie Carrington entirely forgot her duties of chaperonage, and danced straight through the evening, enjoying, as a married woman does, the attention which marriage so often deprives her of.

Bessie Taylor was driven to Mr. Henry's dance

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by the Carringtons. It was a soft summer night, without a suggestion of chill or dampness in it. Both she and Nannie wore the thinnest of summer evening-gowns. Filmy shawls covered their necks and arms.

Chinquapin House was one of those "befo' the wah" buildings that seemed, as one drove up to it at night, to stretch its stuccoed lengths vaguely away towards the horizon. It had been built when size was merely a matter of burning a few more bricks or hewing down a few more trees, and when labor was hardly an item of expense. The façade of white columns in the portico was impressive; and to-night the lower story gleamed with lights. The entire neighborhood had lent silver for the occasion, and Gault had sent over Billy, his butler. It was Billy who greeted them, in a green livery, with large, bright buttons, four of which, on close inspection, declared themselves by their initials as of the Eastover Fire Department, while the other two bore "C. & O. R. R." on their nickel breasts. Uncle Billy beamed with the importance of his post, and bowed low as he saw Mrs. Taylor.

"Ladies, fust do' to the right up-stairs. Genelmen, right wing, second do'. Howdy, Miss Bes-sie? How's Mr. Archie? Howdy, Mr. Hugh? Folks say, nigger 'n' a mule; po' white man an' a

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houn' dog. How come you a-drivin' mules? Hi, chillun!" he said, suspiciously, as the near mule shuffled his feet under him; "ain't gwine kick ole Billy?"

Mrs. Taylor, with a rueful little smile, appreciated that Billy's sentiment towards Redfields was that of the house cat. He saw changes of masters, but clung to the bricks. He had lived there all his life, and the place was more to him than the chance incumbent, now that old General Gault was gone.

"Par o' mules to a spring wagon, an' drive 'em hisself," he said, contemptuously, eying Carrington's dayton and team, after their owner and his party had gone into the house. "Yo' watch my boss 'n' the Redfields ca'iage: shiny harness, ca'iage-driver on the seat, all fixed up, green coat an' buttons, 'n' eve'ything."

"Yaas," answered a stray horse-holder, presumably from Hill Acres, "an' some o' these yere Ca'ingtons was here when yo' boss was du't, an' will be yere when he is du't again. I ain' wu'kin' for no half-strainers o' Yankees — not yet. Thar'll be somebody else in Redfields ca'iage 'fo' you die, you yuh me!"

The prophecy came true sooner than the prophet could reasonably have expected; for just then the two heavy bays in the shining har-

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ness of Billy's boast drew up. There was the coat of green on the proud driver, but Billy opened the door on St. Clair alone.

It was late when the dance fairly opened. Virginia affairs in the summer have a trick of being late. One must wait till the earth has cooled somewhat from the day's strong sunshine. Trueman had gone to the Sanfords' in the afternoon to drive Virginia over, leaving St. Clair, who was staying with him, to descend alone statelily from the family coach.

Gault at this time was not the eager, high-spirited lover who had won Virginia. Often he was engrossed in his thoughts when he was with her, and moody; for the sight of her always reminded him that without Redfields he would again be hopelessly divided from her in a material way. It was true, money was not an element that need enter into her selection. But though many a prince has wooed as a pauper, it is very different to have won as a prince and be discovered a pauper.

Chinquapin House was suited for a dance, with its broad hall opening by folding-doors into the big parlors. Mr. Henry's small outfit of furniture was considered rather an advantage for dancing, until it was discovered that there were not chairs enough to go around. But stairs are

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always superior to chairs for companies that divide themselves naturally into couples; and planks supported on saw-horses are admirable—and who thinks of furniture, anyway, at a dance in Virginia, if the floor and the music are good?

St. Clair, the best-dressed man present, stood in the doorway a few minutes before he entered. His eyes ignored the men and rested on one girl after another, weighing claims of beauty and charm; at least so Gault thought, for he came up to him and said:

"Well, who gets the blue ribbon? Make up your mind and we'll see if we agree."

"I made up mine some years ago; but it's not for you to know, True."

"Years? I didn't know any one could claim you for more than weeks." As he spoke, True-man moved away, in search of a partner.

"Choosing somebody to rush for the evening?" his gray-haired host asked St. Clair, coming up.

"Hullo, Henry! Your fascinations are sort of side-tracked this evening. Duties as host—have to dance with the wall-flowers, and all that. You can't be poking in your nose trying to break me up."

"Depends upon whom you rush," Henry warily answered.

"Is that Mrs. Taylor through that door?" In-

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sensibly, St. Clair straightened himself a trifle. "I didn't know she was going out yet. And who is that saturnine-looking fellow with her?"

"Looks as pretty as if she were just turning out, eh, Saint? You don't know the man with her? Why, that's Duncan Armistead, of Baltimore. He came down to visit the Hudsons; but I'm told he only takes his meals and sleeps there. You know he used to know her before she married Archie."

"H'm! He's old Governor Armistead's son, isn't he?"

"Yes. Looks like a good match for her, doesn't it? He's a mighty good fellow, they say."

"He's rich, too?"

"Virtue number one. And he has others. However, from the way things have begun this evening he won't have a walk-over. Even you have your backers; though there is not that unanimity of opinion in regard to your virtues that a well-wisher could desire. Miss Bessie herself once said that you—"

"Well, what?"

"Had a curious kind of fascination— Perhaps I am betraying a sacred confidence."

"I have no such fear. It has rather the sound of a violent 'jolly.'"

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Henry hesitated. St. Clair waited for compliment or thrust.

"A curious kind of fascination—for girls that didn't know you."

The shot unmasked St. Clair for a moment, and Henry left him with secret satisfaction at finding a vulnerable spot. He liked St. Clair, but not in connection with Mrs. Taylor.

Henry's words hurt the younger man more than he was willing to admit even to himself. St. Clair left his comfortable position by the door-jamb, singled out Miss Sanford and Gault from among the dancers, and asked her to divide the dance with him.

"This is such a funny custom of dividing the dances down here," she said, as she was borne off.

"I had waited as long as my patience lasted. You mustn't dance with one man all the evening; it's too marked."

"Oh, that was your reason, was it?" she laughed.

"No, that was not my reason," he answered, and she looked up to meet eyes expressing devotion which, if feigned, was remarkably well done. And the coquette in her appreciated his skilled love-making.

For several dances she did not see him in the

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room and rather resented his defection, though there was a plethora of partners, the normal supply of the neighborhood being swelled by visiting cousins from cities. Gault seemed inclined to dance with no one except her, yet there was a preoccupation about him that vexed her. He was not moody, but he failed to amuse, and she expected amusement this evening.

On one occasion when the music stopped she took a seat beside Bessie Taylor and despatched her partner, a visiting cousin, to the strenuous contest centring about the bucket of ice-water.

"I have been trying all the evening to tell you how glad I was to see you here," she said to Mrs. Taylor.

"Thank you," Bessie answered. "I don't believe any one who has cared for dancing as much as I have, ever gets so she doesn't. I shall feel very solemn when I begin to be invited to dances only as a chaperon. But a woman can never tell who will be nice to her at a dance. The men she counts on most are sure to fail her."

"I should say they did. At the beginning of the evening, from the way Mr. St. Clair talked to me I thought he was going to give me a tremendous rush, and he hasn't been near me since."

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"He hasn't been in the room for four dances," Mrs. Taylor said. "There he is coming now."

The visiting cousin had hardly brought Virginia her glass of water before the music began again. He importuned her for another dance, and she began the dance with him. St. Clair fancied he read invitation in her eyes as she passed him, and asked her for the remainder of it.

"Have you a brand-new reason for dancing with me this time? You seem to think you must exhibit reasons. You've had plenty of time to evolve a good one."

St. Clair glanced at Gault standing in a doorway. "It is reason, not inclination, which has kept me away. Were I to follow the promptings of my heart, I might make an enemy of a very good friend—and that in a pursuit which after all would prove futile."

"How considerate of you! But I should have thought," she said, mischievously, "her nature above jealousy."

"*Her* nature?" he blurted out.

"You were speaking of Bessie Taylor, weren't you?" she asked, innocently.

St. Clair recovered himself. "You are wide of the mark. If Miss Bessie is showing any jealousy, I'm afraid it must be because Armistead is straying. I was speaking of True."

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"I am sure your modesty is deceiving you," Virginia replied, mockingly.

"I spoke to her early in the evening, and she went a-dancing off with another man with the most unflattering alacrity."

"Her eyes have been following you all the evening," Virginia continued. "Look now!"

St. Clair turned his head, and as he caught Bessie's glance—instantly averted—his heart gave one of those starts within his breast which has led men to consider it the seat of the affections.

Virginia caught Bessie's glance, too, and for the first time it caused her to think that perhaps she had accidentally betrayed another woman's secret.

"Let's go out-doors," she said.

They went out to a bench beneath the trees on the lawn. Virginia stopped as she was about to sit down. "It is cruel of me to bring you out here. You may not be able to escape to her for ever so long."

"The cruelty is to you—the escape hers," he answered, suavely.

"Then you admit the truth of what I said." Virginia's deduction was not warranted logically.

St. Clair placidly lighted a cigarette. Vehe-

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ment denials he thought less convincing than a cavalier silence.

"Are you going to marry her?" Virginia asked, lightly.

"There is no—"

"Then why don't you take some one of your own size to flirt with?" she interrupted, with sudden anger.

"Meaning—?"

"Oh, your own kind. Some one who won't care."

"You, for example?" he asked, gently.

"Or else go away and not see her any more. I don't believe you would do that, even if you thought her happiness depended on it."

"I think I could," he answered, gravely.

"Then do it. Go away and spend your life in following the whim of the moment, the girl of the hour. If you must make conquests—"

St. Clair laughed. "Aren't we getting rather melodramatic?" he broke in. "Every unattached female is not dying of love for me. This is the setting for sentiment, not for blood-and-thunder." He waved his cigarette comprehensively at the lawn and the moon. "I know nature does not always provide the proper setting for our emotions. Therefore it behooves us to attune our sentiments to nature

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so far as possible. I am not a ravening wolf seeking what lambs I may devour, though I perhaps know even better than you how little worthy of Miss Bessie I am."

"But you are, in some ways," Virginia said, the spirit of contradiction upon her.

"I don't know of any, I must confess. Armistead, I imagine, is as worthy of her as any one I ever knew. He is a pattern of all the virtues," St. Clair said. "What should I have to offer, anyway? I should think you would regard me as quite safe. I am not a boy. I would not propose matrimony with empty hands."

"It isn't what a man has, but what he is, that matters to a woman who cares for him. When a man is something, he will be something. Opportunity doesn't come only to Duncan Armistead. You, the brother-in-law to an earl, can't plead that there is no chance for you to get out of the rut. Come, we must go in."

She rose, and they walked up and down the lawn a few minutes, talking on indifferent subjects. As they stopped at the foot of the steps leading up to the porch, Virginia said:

"You must hate me, Mr. St. Clair, for the way I have spoken to you."

"On the contrary, I like you very much."

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"As much as before?" She drew a trifle closer to him.

"Much more."

He reached out his hand to take hers; but she turned quickly and ran up the steps.

St. Clair had no intention of seeing Mrs. Taylor again that evening, but he was hardly on the porch when Carrington told him that she wished to see him.

"Tell her I'm about to go home, Hugh," St. Clair said. "Give her any excuse you like."

Hugh eyed him suspiciously. "You seem all right, Saint. No one would know it."

Mrs. Taylor appeared on the porch unexpectedly, and St. Clair went to her, flight being impossible. He noticed her flushed face and a long lock of fair hair which had escaped from imprisonment and now clung a suppliant about the white neck. Her dress rose and fell with her swift breathing. Miss Sanford must have dreamed her curious idea, and in some way made him see what she thought she saw.

"Evening dress is very becoming to you," St. Clair said.

"Do you think so? Then you should not have avoided me all the evening. When you spoke to me first I hadn't a chance to thank

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you for that time you went for the doctor for Archie." She spoke reproachfully. Then, looking down at her dress, she said: "I feel queer in it. I asked Mrs. Letcher how I looked, and she said, 'Well, ma'am, I think black is more becoming.' But it isn't, is it? Do you think I took it off too soon? I don't want Archie always to remember me in black, and father said once that he hoped I shouldn't wear black for him. But I couldn't help doing it. Now I ought to think of Archie; don't you think so? Aren't we going to dance?"

St. Clair did not want to dance with her. He could not trust himself to put his arm around her and then go away, as he had told Miss Sanford he would. Either he must be rude, an obvious impossibility for him, or give a reason that would lower him again in her eyes.

"I am not fit to dance," he said, steadily.

"Oh! are you sick? I am so sorry. Can't I do anything for you? It was so good of you to get the doctor the other night so quickly. I don't know what I should have done but for you. Why haven't you been to see me since?"

"I was ashamed to come, Miss Bessie." He was losing his grip on himself with those gentle eyes upon him. Was it true, what he thought he had seen? Could it be true that she loved

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him? And could a man married to her be low, despicable, untrustworthy? The answer was history: Archie had been all these.

"I thought so," she said; "but we women forgive—and you helped Archie, anyway. You are wonderful with horses. Do I preach too much when you come? Then you mustn't invite it."

She smiled so frankly, her proffered comradeship was so spontaneous that St. Clair felt the sting of his own unworthiness in his very soul. The pity of it was strong upon him. Must she be doomed to another Archie? Why should such a woman be put into the world for such men as Archie and himself? In his contempt of self he classed them together.

But it was hard to deny himself the looking into her face; hard to go away from the sound of her voice; hard, this minute, not to put his arm around her waist and dance slowly down the room, and in the isolation of dancing and in the closeness to her tell her that he loved her, and swear before Heaven to run straight. No! No! Temptation was knocking; the door was not bolted. Unless he fastened it now he could never fasten it. The strongest temptation and the strongest reason for withstanding it were united in Bessie Taylor. As he stood before her, he swayed from the conflict of his emotions.

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"Robert!" she cried, a look of fear coming into her eyes—the fear for another's manhood, which is worse than other fear.

St. Clair started to speak, then closed his lips. Here was the chance to shut himself out of her life irrevocably.

After a second her face hardened: "You conceal it better this time. I am glad you told me. I might have danced with you—ugh!" A shudder of loathing passed over her. "You should have told Miss Sanford. You have spent the evening with her. I don't think she likes drunken admirers. Perhaps you have been making love to her."

Was there any desire to know the truth of this assertion? St. Clair could allow himself this grace, anyway.

"You have spoiled Mr. Gault's evening, anyway," she said, with a catch in her voice—"and mine, too."

Did she say the last words, or not? The sob muffled her voice and she was leaving him as she spoke. He was forced to rush hastily to her side or she would have crossed the room alone.

XVII

ST. CLAIR went away immediately. Uncle Billy, from his post on the porch, called importantly for the Redfields "ca'iage." St. Clair got in and was driven home in a state of semi-unconsciousness, for which he was thankful. He went into the dining-room, lighted a lamp, and poured some whiskey into a glass. Not until it burned in his mouth did he realize his action. He went to the window and spat it out.

"Not so soon as this, anyway," he said to himself. The words expressed the lack of faith he felt in himself. It is anything but a pleasant moment when one faces a weakness of one's own and feels the degradation of the doubt of one's ability to conquer it. One thing he had not to reproach himself with: he had spoken no word of love to Bessie Taylor. That, at least, was not on his conscience. He had only himself, his own future, to wreck or to save. He could go to the devil and have no one else concerned. And drink was not his only weakness. No; Bessie

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had judged him more truly: he was entirely unworthy of trust.

He opened a dictionary, and with a sort of fierce pleasure looked up "trust." Let him see definitely what trust was.

"Reliance of mind on the integrity, veracity, justice, friendship, or other sound principle of another person."

And the only way he could prevent other persons from injury was by never putting himself in such a position that they must rely on his integrity, veracity, justice, friendship, or sound principle. "No need of advertising the lack," he thought, grimly; "a chance observer can see it now." If drink were only his sole weakness! It was only one. Hatred of responsibility; dislike of continuous labor; temporary fascination with every pretty face—fine qualities to be equipped with! And yet he loved that gentle, fair-haired woman, and had loved her in the days when he used to bring Archie home. And his love for her had not worked any change in him. Archie had loved her, too; had hiccupped his affection for her in the bar-rooms of the town; had wept maudlin tears in St. Clair's buggy describing her goodness and her beauty. Had put his arms around her and kissed her, and told her how

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much he loved her, with the smell of whiskey on his breath, his mind fuddled, and his senses inflamed. St. Clair felt sick as these pictures came into his mind and would not leave it. She had better marry Armistead; he was a good man; anybody rather than himself. The issue became clearer with the burst of jealousy that came over him as he thought of her again the wife of some one else. It was drink and his other faults *vs.* Mrs. Taylor. A preference for his vices to her. His present life to a life with her. There was no mistake in his deductions. But, on the other hand, was it possible for him to be all the things that at present he was not? Could Robert Salsford St. Clair become somebody else—for that is what it would amount to? His mind wandered away into the haze of speculation, and he took up the guitar and sang softly to himself. Were habits like his absolutely permanent? Could he change his nature? Was he not one billed and tagged: destination the devil?

There was a loud outcry from the lawn in a familiar voice. He answered it, and Terry stamped through the hall and into the room.

"Hi, Saint! Caterwauling to yourself, as usual. All the red liquor inside you, I reckon. Hulloo! full decanter! How come that? Well, here's for a small drink. Can I fill for you?"

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"No, I've had all I'm going to take."

"Hi! is this Robert Salsford St. Clair, or somebody else?"

"I wish to God it was somebody else."

"Well, I, for one, don't. A man's got to have friends going his way or it would be devilish lonesome." Terry was in an expansive humor.

"Not much danger of lonesomeness," St. Clair said, saturninely.

"No; heaven for climate, hell for society, as they say." Terry emptied his glass. "The truth is, we sinners have got to stick together. We aren't much, either of us, except on a horse—and that brother-in-law of yours, his lordship or whatever you call him—Maude, you know—is better than both of us put together—but what we are, we are. There ain't any power on earth to make us anything else."

"That's what Christ said, isn't it?"

"I reckon so; but I don't know much about Him. Wouldn't listen, I reckon, when I might have learned. If there's some power up yonder, I don't know anything about it; but if He says so, I reckon He's right. I expect I swear now and then, but I don't say His name. No, suh, I don't say 'by—' His name, you know. I swear in a general way, but I 'ain't never said that."

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"Look here, Terry, do you reckon I could make myself over?"

"No, suh!—'less you're lookin' for miracles, you understand. I *know*; I ain't guessin'. I done tried." He relapsed more and more into the vernacular. "If 'twar one thing, like liquor, you might; but it sorter breaks out in another place, like a fire in a hay-barn. Smother it in one end, and t'other end is in a full blaze. I tried it with tobacco: stopped smokin' when I got ma'ied—took to chewin', an' like to chewed myself to death. Went back to smokin'—an' now, what d' you reckon?—I do both at the same time."

Terry had no consciousness of any humor in his mental and moral struggles and lapses. "There's one failin' I ain't got, Saint, and neither have you. Jones an' the rest of the Court House gang have got all ours and that, too. He's worse 'n either of us. I'm bad, but I ain't rotten. Here's Gault, now; he drinks an' he ain't any too much account, but it's all skin deep. He might wake up to-morrow and turn saint without any trouble. You and me ain't saints, and we couldn't be. You're badly misnamed, old man." Terry laughed at the time-worn joke. "What's the use of tryin' to be somethin' you can't be, so long as there's a horse to ride and

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a hound with a good nose, and a fox to hunt? Wait till summer's over and we'll get after 'em again. Maybe your horse will fall at a fence and kill you some day."

"Hurrah for that day," St. Clair said.

"I ain't sayin' I'd like it, and want'n' it won't bring it. Ten to one he'd get over. But between you and me, when you come to think about it, this sportin' life ain't what it's cracked up to be. There was Hugh Ca'ington; what made him?—just a girl that don't weigh much over a hundred pounds."

"Then there *are* other things besides miracles."

"Miss Nannie's a miracle," Terry said, and took off his hat for the first time. "He's all right now. No snivel, no fuss; but he's a man, an' she made him one—but you 'n' me! It 'd be a big contrac' for any woman. An' 'tain't fair not to think of her. I ain't so well born as you, but I know what a gentleman is, and he ain't that; he wouldn't go to a woman an' say, 'Here I am! I ain't much—you reform me.' Well, I must be goin'. No; I can't spend the night. 'Bliged to be at home soon in the morning. Been up in Buckingham buyin' cattle, an' saw your light from the road."

Terry went away, and St. Clair heard him singing with his usual disregard of tune far down

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the road. His moral reflections had not unduly cast him down.

Gault came in just after daylight. "I wanted to see you," he said. "It's best to know how we stand. Is there a drop of anything?"

"I haven't touched it," St. Clair answered. "I'm not drinking any more." He wanted to say something irrevocable—to put himself on record.

"You mean just now."

"I mean just now, and just what I said."

Gault sneeringly filled a glass and carried it to him. "Here, drink it."

St. Clair took the glass, eyed it steadily a moment, and then threw glass and contents into the empty fireplace.

"What do you mean by that?"

"Get thee behind me, Satan," St. Clair answered, lightly.

Gault looked at him curiously. "You take any amount of trouble in your love-making: you're an artist. If a moral tone is required, you assume that as well as any other. Of course, you know her money is all right. It may be troublesome for you to keep up the part until it is safely yours, but no doubt it is worth it."

St. Clair laid down the guitar and arose to his

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feet, in feature and dress composed and unruffled. For the moment Gault hated him from his soul—hated the distinction of his presence, the unconscious grace of carriage, the clear-cut features. Gault had never seen the sister, the present Countess of Chiswick, but he knew that she was a great beauty, and that St. Clair was like her.

St. Clair spoke quietly. "True, you are a good deal mistaken in some things, but your attitude is partly just."

Gault's anger was nowise lessened by St. Clair's admission. But for his present morbid state of wretchedness he would never have spoken as he had—would not have felt the insensate jealousy that now welled up within him. On the drive home he had remonstrated with Virginia, and she, smarting beneath accusations of her own conscience, had replied angrily, and bitter feeling had been left on both sides.

Uncle Billy poked his head into the room, and Gault, unstrung by his anger, slammed the glass he held in his hand at the yellow eyeballs and kinky hair, with a fierce command to get out. Billy ducked, and the door shut with a crash.

"You know the game so well," Gault said anew. "An honest man, awkward because of his love, would stand no chance against a pro-

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fessional charmer like you. What girl can resist the brother of the Countess of Chiswick? What man was ever safe against her—”

“Gault!” cried St. Clair, horrified at the turn of events, now threatening a deadly quarrel. “Stop, or we shall be killing each other. For Heaven’s sake let me go while I can!”

He jerked a revolver out of his pocket and flung it out of the window.

Gault himself shuddered as he realized how close they had been to flying at each other’s throats. He walked over to the window and looked out.

“I didn’t mean it, Saint. I beg your pardon.”

“All right. We’d better not risk any more, though. I’m going up to put on my riding-breeches.”

“Where are you going?”

“I can’t be sure till I hit the county road. Carrington said something about a house-party for next week. I may go over to see about it. Are you going down?”

“I don’t know. It’s a peach of a day, anyway.”

XVIII

ST. CLAIR rode away on his big, brown half-bred, which glistened in the sunlight from the efforts of the Redfields groom.

Uncle Billy essayed another entrance after St. Clair's departure, with much preliminary scouting at the keyhole. He opened the door noiselessly, poked in his head, said "Howdy, boss?" and shut the door quickly. After one or two more manœuvres, he came in.

"Mail and s'press over by the window," he said, presently. "Shall I get a hatchet 'n' open this yer box?"

"Yes. Give me the letters." Gault had been away since early the day before. As he was opening the last letter, Billy began operations on the box.

"Oh, hold on a minute," Gault said, irritably, "till I get through breakfast. Then smash things as much as you like."

It was an innocent-looking letter, postmarked "Richmond Hill, L. I." Save for whitening to his

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lips, Trueman read it through without giving a sign of the nature of its contents.

"RICHMOND HILL, LONG ISLAND, N. Y.,

"August 11, 1900.

"*Mr. Gault, of Redfields:*

"DEAR SIR,—In searching for bags in our attic, for our summer outing, we found one which we learned, on opening it, to belong to your uncle. We send it to you to-day by express. How it has lain here all this time I cannot understand, especially since we, with one of his lawyer's clerks, searched for any belongings of his at the time of his death. He visited us just before his death, and must have left it *then, and* the servant—whom we discharged about the same time—must have put it away in the attic without telling us anything of it. I have not examined its contents except to see his name on the linen inside, and to recognize a pair of slippers which I remember he bought here, as his feet pained him after his day's tramping on the city pavements. Congratulating you on the possession of the estate he loved so well,

"I remain, yours very truly,

"MARIA GRANT CHENEY."

"Hi!" said Uncle Billy in a low tone to himself, "this yere looks like ole marster's bag." The negro's curiosity had got its grip on him, and he was on his knees, noiselessly prying the cover off.

Gault wheeled around. "Get out of here!

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What the devil are you doing with my box? Get out!" he cried, with such ferocity that Billy was out of the room and down the hall almost before the final command.

Billy met a servant bringing up breakfast on a tray, and he shooed her back. "Keep away!" he cried. "Boss is just rarin' an' snortin' aroun' like a stud-horse. He's gwine to kill somebody. He'd 'a' ruined ma head with a chair ef I hadn't been mighty soople."

"Like to ha' ruined ma head," he told the servants in the kitchen again, feeling the importance of his position and story. "Ain' gwine back thar."

"Got out quick, did you?" a garden-hand asked, loitering in the kitchen.

"I didn't make no stop. 'Twas good-bye an' *g-o-n-e!*" Billy answered, with an emphasizing drawl.

"Sorter like the tarrapin, eh, Unc' Billy? Good thing you war fast."

All knew the story, but the negro mind delights in repetition, and to them an old story loses nothing by a new recital.

"Yas, suh; good thing I war *fast*," cackled Billy, the story now properly falling on him to tell, he being the hero of the adventure. "Ter-rapin seven years crossing the road. Jes as he

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got over the las' wagon track, ca'iage bresh his tail. 'Hi!' says Terrapin, 'good thing I war fast.' Hi! hi! 'Good thing I war fast,' says Terrapin."

Gault knocked the cover off the box, seized the bag, and carried it to his room. He locked the door, and then, with every finger acting with the awkwardness of a thumb, he opened it, On top, neatly folded, was the linen described. With the seizing on detail of the mind at such times, he noted the great size his uncle must have been, as he spread open a shirt. Then he came to the slippers, emblazoned with the legend "strictly first quality"; a nightgown; and beneath these a long envelope, addressed and stamped. He read the address:

"W. D. Henry, Esq.,
Chinquapin,
Cartersbrook P. O.,
Eastover County,
Virginia."

"Well, here goes my beautiful castle in Spain," he said, with a short laugh. His eyes felt hot, and he went over to the washstand and bathed them. Then, returning, he took out the papers from the unsealed envelope, tearing it in the action. The first paper he opened was a letter, which he read:

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"RICHMOND HILL, N. Y.,

"October 17, 1899.

"DEAR HENRY,—I am writing you from a friend's house, where I have spent the night. I shall go in town to-day, and while there will sign and acknowledge my will, which I will enclose to you. Take good care of it, for I have delayed too long now. But you know what my dilemma has been.

"Bessie is still at Old Point, but says she will come home as soon as I am ready to return. I shall be glad to get back. The older one grows, the more attractive home becomes. If you ride by Redfields take a look at the yearling steers and see if they are falling off any. The overseer says there is plenty of grass yet, but it seems to me that we ought to begin feeding them. That can wait, though, if it puts you out. Don't go for that especially.

Yours truly,

"T. H. GAULT.

"P. S.—You don't know what a relief it is that Bessie's future is assured. I feel young enough to outlast her, though."

Gault read the letter so quickly the first time that he hardly took in its meaning. Then he read it over again and again. No more sophistry now for him. Here it was given in detail. No need to look at the will. Bessie Taylor was the heir, he an interloper. Back to New York; back to the hall bedroom; back to the *Planet* and to the caprices of Johnson, the city editor. The picture of it all came to him so clearly it seemed

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as if he had just left it. Every face around his boarding-house table recurred to him with a distinctness of outline that was startling: the girl who always came down to breakfast in the pink dressing-sacque; the man opposite to her with the glorious, glassy diamond; the uncertain-aged lady from beneath whose magnificent pompadour the wire rat occasionally peeped coyly forth; the gentlemanly insurance agent, and all the rest.

A few words of the letter came back to his mind in this flow of mental images: "I am writing to you from a friend's house. . . . I shall go to town to-day. . . ." He read the letter again, slowly and carefully; then quickly turned to the other papers. There were three wills, two of them in Henry's handwriting, one in his uncle's, and all of them unsigned.

"Unsigned, thank God!" he cried. He thrust the papers into his breast-pocket, nearly pulled the knob off his door before he remembered he had locked it, and went down-stairs three steps at a time.

"Billy!"

A head was poked cautiously out from the door leading to the kitchen.

"Are we never going to have breakfast?"

"Yas, *suh!* Comin' now, boss. Come on yuh, Sallie!"

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The reaction was so great that Gault, helping himself largely to everything Billy brought in, could hardly eat a mouthful. His elation lasted through the day. All day he rode about the two thousand acres of the home farm, joked with the overseer and the hands, jumped his mare over fences and "branches"—dangerous as streams are in summer, when their banks are masked under the luxuriant growth fostered by the water.

But next morning a return to his former state of mind began surely to creep over him. Although the absolute certainty of possession was now his, there remained no last doubt, or hope of doubt, about his uncle's intentions as to the disposition of the property. Had General Gault not been killed as he was, Mrs. Taylor would now be at Redfields, and he himself still struggling to advance himself in, and to escape from, newspaper work. And St. Clair would very likely be sitting in this room as its master. The thought was bitter as it came to him. He had been jealous of St. Clair with Miss Sanford. He found himself even more jealous of him with Redfields. Jealousy is an emotion governed by no rules of logic or reason when once it seizes a man; and Gault suddenly felt quite certain that, had Mrs. Taylor inherited Redfields, St. Clair would have been married to her.

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He took the three wills from his pocket, and read them carefully. The earliest one left the place to Archie, with a life interest in it to his mother. The second one gave it unreservedly to Mrs. Taylor; and the third, wholly in the handwriting of Mr. Gault, was similar to the second, with a few minor changes. It was apparently unfinished; for whereas each of the other two included a bequest to himself of ten thousand dollars, the holograph will stopped just before this clause.

Gault studied them a long time, thinking what a vast difference a minute's work on them with pen and witnesses would have made to him. While his thoughts were far from satisfactory, yet he was relieved of the vague dread, which had been with him ever since St. Clair's revelations, that some day a will might be found to dispossess him of everything that made life worth living. He felt absolutely convinced now that he held in his hands, unsigned, all existing wills of General Gault. But the burden he bore had only changed its nature. He took no more jaunts about the farm. His overseer found him sullenly uninterested in the work on the place. Fear of possible loss had become disenchantment for what he had. Pride in being a link in the long line of Gaults at Redfields, with the honor

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of continuing its traditions, was no longer possible to a nature like his. The estate now stood only as a thing of a certain intrinsic value, yielding a certain income. It had no more character or interest for him at present than government bonds. Pride in the ownership of it could only be to her for whom it was intended.

XIX

ST. CLAIR, on Roanoke, whose steel-spring strength, between his knees, was subject to his slightest will, felt in the humor for a change of scene, for a long ride to some house out of the neighborhood, or even to Richmond. It was only a little after daylight, and the whole day was before him. That he had not slept was a small matter to a vitality like his. He craved something amusing to do. It was the quality that made against the application of his energy to any one thing for an appreciable time. We associate this quality with very young persons, and often excuse the sowing of wild oats as also a sin of youth with belief in its temporary character; but here was a man over thirty still at that kind of agriculture.

He rode down the Redfields lane, weighing the probabilities of amusement offered by the houses of his friends. The steam thrasher was at work on the Redfields wheat crop. The buzz of the engine deadened all every-day country sounds. The smell of coffee from an adjacent cottage came

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to St. Clair appetizingly, and reminded him that he had had no breakfast, though this was not a thing to plan for in a country where he would be asked to breakfast as a matter of course at the first house where he stopped.

He chose the house of Gault's overseer, hunger, whetted by the coffee-sniff, now having become a definite consideration. He knocked at the door, and Mrs. Barney opened it and welcomed him with cordiality. Her husband had been a small farmer back in the "flat woods" before he came to Redfields, and no more honest, whole-souled people exist anywhere than those folk who cultivate with their own hands fifty or a hundred acres of poor land back from the big places along the river. They are a distinct type of Virginians, self-respecting, very strict in religious observances, narrow, maybe, but as hospitable and polite as the "great" families of the river, with whom they have no relations, and of whom, except by reputation, they know little.

St. Clair had no airs among the poor. He bent his head to escape the lintel of the door, and took a chair and a share in the conversation about Mr. Gault's wheat crop being mighty late threshing, and the teamster Moses's third child's fever, and the best way to keep skippers out of meat.

"I haven't no faith in this yer tale about borax

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on hams; have you Mistuh Saint? Looks like there's sense in ashes and molasses; anyway, the old-timey way is good enough for me. Have your meat done crisp? I can't eat it that-a-way myself; but poor folks' eatin's ain't like rich folks', anyway you fix it. Let me make you some fresh biscuits. These yere are cold."

"No, I won't allow it. This coffee is the genuine thing. How are my shirts coming on?"

"Glad you like it. Shirts! There, I knew you'd ask, and I'm ashamed of myself that I ain't tetch'd 'em. Gregory, get off that table! That blessed young one is more trouble than the other six. Poor folks always have a lot, don't they? I'll get to work on them shirts to-day, and I'll have my sister over to help me. D' you know her? She's lived up in Louisa ever sense she was ma'ied; but her husband he was killed last month on the railroad, an' she's come back here. She's a very fine lady—fine common lady, you understand. I've been makin' some white things for Miss Bessie. I 'clar, Mistuh Saint, I wonder some of you rich fellers don't marry her. She's a somebody worth ma'ing. She used to come and sit here many an afternoon when I was sewing for her, and any of these dirty little brats of mine could sit in her lap and welcome. She wouldn't hurt the feelings of a fly.

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Looks like them kind of ladies always gets the nubbins when it comes to ma'ing. I don't never go to Redfields house no mo'. She used to get me to come up sometimes when they was cleanin'. Niggers don't half clean, you know. Some way I can't go now. Looks like I ought to see her there. My ole man goes over to see her nigh every Sunday. I expect he gets about to the gate an' pulls off his hat an' says, Howdy and Good-bye, and comes home; but he always goes eve'y Sunday, 'n' I say, 'What she say to you, Mistuh Barney?' 'n' he says, 'She said, "Glad to see you, Mr. Barney,"' 'n' I say, 'Did you go in?' 'n' he says, 'No, I says Howdy, 'n' come on back.' Looks like he might 'a' gone up to the po'ch, but no. Now, ain' that a visit! But he thinks a right smaht of her, and so do I. I wish I was rich; I know who'd get my money."

"I wish I were, too," St. Clair said, rising. "I'm just as much obliged to you as I can be for the good breakfast."

"Oh, I'm mighty glad you happened by. Glad to see you any time," she said, with pleased cordiality, as he shook hands with her.

Romance and sentiment are not exclusively possessed by men irreproachably clothed. As he rode up to the threshing-machine, St. Clair looked with a new interest at Gault's overseer,

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working in a nimbus of chaff and dust. Here was a little, dried-up man with a scraggy beard—powdered at the moment with the flying dirt—with grimy hands, and dressed in patched jeans of various shades of weather-beaten blue. He was in consultation with another grimy person, whom St. Clair recognized as the owner of the machine.

Conversation stopped as St. Clair came up. Mr. Barney was called away, and the proprietor of the thresher addressed St. Clair. "I sorter promised him to pull into Mrs. Taylor's after I finished this crop," he said. "But Mr. Hugh Ca'ington is pushin' me, and if I don't get in there soon some other fellow will. There's little enough in threshin', anyway, an' I can't afford to pull in to her place for a couple of hundred bushels when there's a big crop right at hand. You see how it is. But he's mad; says that I promised to go to her; that her crop is in bad shape an' can't wait. I'm late now, I know. Says he won't pull me out if I'm not goin' thar." He was working himself up to a truculent state. "I reckon these yere teams belong to Mr. Gault. I'll see him."

"Wait a minute," St. Clair said. "Oh! Mr. Barney!"

The overseer came up, visibly nervous.

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"In course I've got to hitch the mules to this yere box ef Mr. Gault say so," he said, intuition furnishing him with the gist of the conversation between the thresher and St. Clair. "They ain' my mules; but I'm paid to work 'em, and the way I takes it is this-a-way: This threshin'-box comes into a neighborhood; it goes right *th'ough* the neighborhood, an' each plantation pulls it to the nex'. Now, what call has I got to pull it 'way yonder to the last place in the neighborhood when there's crops between? Old man Brown-ing's team pulled it yere. I pulls it to Mrs. Taylor's, and so on. I can't see no sense in no other way."

"But who'll pull me from Mrs. Taylor's to Cartersbrook if I take 'em in turn?" the thresher asked, with the air of delivering a knock-out. "She ain't got team enough to pull me all ter onc't, 'n' I can't fool along with my engine sot down, waitin' for the box."

"I'll pull your box to Cartersbrook," said Barney. "Take me less time to pull you to Miss Bes-sie's, 'n' from thar to Mr. Jim's, than from here to Hill Acres."

"That's fair," St. Clair said, thoroughly entertained by the overseer's diplomacy.

"No, suh! I can't resk it. You might not have your team in place when I got th'ough."

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The thresher naturally itched for the Hill Acres crop.

"Well, you won't finish here to-night," St. Clair put in, "and I'll ride over to Mr. Hugh Carrington's and Mr. Jim Carrington's to-day and get them to wait for you."

"That would be all right, then. I hate to disoblige a lady; but business is business."

St. Clair galloped across the field, taking a short cut to Hill Acres.

"Spec' he'll see that gap down," the overseer ruminated, looking after him, "but he ain't got no call to tell. Miss Bessie's pasture ain't nuthin, now, an' our field ain't got a head of stock on it—grass jus' goin' to waste. I works here for Mr. Gault, and the Lord ain't gwine blame me ef her sheep do get a little o' his grass. Many a time I gets stuck to know just what to do about things, an' Mr. Gault he don't know, mebbe, an' I asks her, an' she tells me. Mr. Gault suhtainly owes her a little grass. There ain't no sense in law any way you fix it. Who'd 'a' thought— Blast that nigger! Hook your off leader's trace, Tom. Can't you see nuthin'? Bring up that water-wagon now on the run." Barney mounted his horse, and followed the two wagons laden with bags of wheat up the hill to the granary, his mind on the old question of the Redfields succession.

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St. Clair's course carried him near the pulled-down fence, and he recognized the alien sheep in Gault's field. It might have been an accident. Some passing negro might have done it to make himself an easier path to his cabin. There was nothing about the broken stake and the tumble of rails to indicate an ulterior motive with any certainty; yet with what had just gone before, and with the close-cropped turf on the other side, St. Clair had his suspicions. He laughed as he jumped his horse over the rails. "Good man, Barney. You're an artist in your line. Gault himself would never think anything if he saw it; and Miss Bessie's house is over the ridge, out of sight."

St. Clair had marvelled, as he rode along, to see how well Redfields plantation was looking. Gault, he knew, had nowadays made it a point of importance to try to farm well, and had learned to manage with astonishing readiness. It argued unusual capacity in Gault that he could take up so successfully a difficult business like farming, with its infinite detail, and could handle the labor of the country with the tact and firmness necessary. For the African works where he likes and when he likes, and if he doesn't like one place he migrates to another with the irresponsibility of a crow. The differ-

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ence in the productibility of farms thereabouts was as much in the characters of the masters as in the richness of the lands. The best negroes drifted to Hugh Carrington's, strict as was his standard of a day's work, while Jim, his cousin, got the worst spirits in the community, and was always in trouble with them.

St. Clair came upon Hugh sitting on his horse in the middle of a big field. A large force of hands, with brier-blade, axe, and fork, were cleaning creek-banks and grubbing up sassafras and locust trees.

"They've been here two days," Hugh growled, "and hardly made a showing. This is the last field, though. Let's ride up to that gang on the big branch. They're not half cleaning it."

At his order the hands came back to the point Carrington indicated and went over the slighted work again.

St. Clair noticed Hugh's drawn face and the nervous jerks he gave the bit.

"You look tired," St. Clair said.

"Tired!" exclaimed Carrington. "I came up from Deer Hill yesterday, after having been out in the fields from sun-up, and was out at that dance all night. I haven't had any sleep this summer."

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"Does it amuse?" St Clair asked. "Pardon the curiosity."

"I'm going to make this plantation pay," Hugh answered, doggedly. The horse he was riding looked thin and hard, like the rider. "Seen a thresher anywhere on the road?"

"It's at Gault's. I rode up to see if you wouldn't let him knock out Miss Bessie's crop next. If he does he'll have to take it in regular order, and go to Cartersbrook before he comes here."

"Of course," Hugh answered. "He didn't say anything about hers when he was here, and I was pushing him on general principles. As a matter of fact, he bored me so about a three-legged stud-horse he was riding, I suppose I was short with him. I'll wait for him. Coming to Miss Nan's house-party at Deer Hill? This is my idle month, you know," he said, with a grin. "Have you heard from your sister lately?"

"You mean Fair? No; but I haven't been home for some days, and St. George doesn't know where I am."

"Well, Maude—or Lord Chestnut, as Mandy insists I shall call him—is coming over. Go by the house. I'll be there for dinner. Believe I'll turn in after dinner. I've got to get some sleep, somehow."

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Carrington managed three big places: Hill Acres, in Leicester County, his wife's farm; twenty miles down the river, in Eastover, his own place, Deer Hill; and the adjoining estate of St. Clair's sister, the Countess of Chiswick, an old Tazewell property that had come to her by her first marriage. And he managed them well. The two places in Eastover County were in good running order, and he was now engaged in the arduous task of bringing up a run-down farm at Hill Acres, where he lived. He was a well-to-do farmer, rich according to the standards of the neighborhood. In mules alone—not a permanent investment, for they will die now and then—he had probably five thousand dollars, and he had made all he had, except the land, himself, good evidence of capacity in a country where the profit in corn, hay, and tobacco usually varies from nothing to very little. Labor and fertilizer bills eat the whole thing up, unless one understands the business thoroughly. And now and then comes a big "fresh," and away everything goes—fences, crops, low-lying hay-barns, sometimes the soil itself. But managing them well required application and executive ability that in business would have been requited with much greater monetary reward. The compensations from farming in Virginia are other than financial.

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St. Clair came upon the Carrington heir flat on his back under a tree on the sod of the house-yard, kicking his fat legs meditatively while his nurse leaned over the garden fence to talk to a hoeing beau. There was the placid slumber of summer-time in the yard. The voices of the nurse and the garden laborer were low and unexcited. The sunshine was full on the stucco house. It poured into the open hall door and made a long, bright parallelogram on the brown floor. The window-blinds were shut, and the dark rooms, as seen through the open doors in the hall, looked cool and inviting. The two negroes and the baby were the only living objects in the landscape. Across the fields, on the next ridge, stood the brick stable in the white sunlight. The whole plantation might have been deserted.

A great tree threw its shade across the porch steps, and St. Clair sat down here and fanned himself lazily with his hat, content to wait till his presence was discovered. He did not hear Mrs. Carrington come out of the door and across the porch, nearly an hour later.

"Robert St. Clair!" she said, sharply.

He arose leisurely and bowed.

"Great day! you frightened me! I knew it was you all the time, too, but it brought back old days I had not thought of lately, when Hugh

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used to come and sprawl on those steps; and how cross I used to be with him!"

"I wish some one would be cross with me, then," St. Clair said.

"I am!—right now. Why didn't you dance with me last night?"

"You were such a belle," St. Clair apologized. "After a while I saw there was no chance for me, and I left. Couldn't stand it, you know."

"Catsfoot! You danced with no one except Miss Sanford. Did you know that?"

"I know it now. Last night I was conscious only of her fascinations. I did not know what I was doing. Does the moth know he is moving around the candle?"

"Oh! Too bad she isn't concealed here to hear it, though, no doubt, you have used the figure before. Some way, it doesn't sound extempore."

"It was extempore last night."

"You mean *pro tempore*, don't you?"

"I have forgotten my Latin."

"And will forget her to-morrow."

"Not so soon," he protested.

"Well, it doesn't matter."

"To her?"

"Yes. She's got plenty of sense. Hullo, Hugh! Dinner-time already, is it?"

As they stood up to go in, Nannie, not for the

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first time, noticed the general similarity between the two men, their dark hair and eyes, olive skin, and the straight, muscular figures of men who live out-of-doors, though St. Clair would have looked more or less well dressed in rags, while Hugh always was a trifle untidy even in his best.

"I suppose Miss Bessie will marry Duncan Armistead some day," St. Clair said, casually, during the course of the meal.

Nannie looked up quickly. "Why shouldn't she?" she said. "He'll get her where a woman wants to go."

"Where is that?" St. Clair asked, politely.

"It varies with the woman," Carrington put in, "from a small house on a side street to a big house on the main street. But where does Miss Bessie want to go, Nan—Europe?"

"Heaven?" hazarded St. Clair.

"Neither of you have got a bit of sense," Nan said, scornfully.

"That's unlucky," Hugh chuckled, "if I'm to take you there. Never mind, Nannie, I'd back you to get there—wherever it is—if I were a plumb idiot."

He walked around the table and kissed his wife, and then went out of the room. Nannie and St. Clair found their former seats in the shade on the

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porch steps. He rolled and lighted a cigarette before speaking.

"So, by implication, I am not the man to win a woman's love?"

"To keep it," she corrected, quickly. "You are a winner all right. It is when the wonder of being in love ceases to be a wonder and becomes a commonplace that the other qualities begin to count."

"In other words, I might run Armistead a neck-and-neck race on the flat, but he would leave me at the first jump?" He spoke in an even tone of voice, but could not keep a vibration out of it.

"You might distance him hopelessly in the flat-race of love-making; but marriage is a steeple-chase, and I'm afraid you'd sulk when you came to the Liverpool. You see, I have a sportsman for a husband," she ended, smiling.

St. Clair rode away before the cool of the evening invited him to. He had received one woman's opinion about himself and Bessie Taylor the night before—another's to-day. There was not much diversity in them.

He rode slowly away in the oppressive afternoon sun. Any one seeing him would have thought him the picture of indolence and contentment as he sat in his saddle, his figure in-

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stinctively accommodating itself to the motions of the horse. Yet there was no indolence in his mind. He was thinking so intently that he was not even conscious of the heat. If he kept away from Mrs. Taylor, she would fall in love, naturally, with Armistead. Well, he would do it. He could at least do that for her. He would continue his old career of "rushing" every pretty girl that took his fancy for the moment; he would drink—no! for his own satisfaction he would see if he were not strong enough to give that up; he would go to dances in summer; would fox-hunt in winter; and thus the years would pass. In time he might marry where reason abetted inclination; or, as Terry had suggested, if it were so ordained, he might break his neck at some fence, or, more likely, over some unnoticed grape-vine.

He thought of Virginia Sanford. She could afford the luxury of a husband like himself, if she were so minded. He grinned at the thought of himself as a luxury, yet could catalogue himself nowhere else. But the thought of Miss Sanford did not fit into his present mood, and, instead, he called up the image of the fair-haired woman with brown eyes whom he was to avoid in future as if she were the plague—or, rather, as if he were.

XX

TWO days after the dance at Chinquapin, Miss Sanford rode over to the Redfields cottage to call on Mrs. Taylor. She was moved by a sense of contrition. If she were right in her surmise about Mrs. Taylor's feelings towards St. Clair, she had had no right to betray them to him. If she were wrong, less harm had been done, but again she had no right to make him think they existed. She had spoken to him on impulse; partly, perhaps, to see how he would take it. She had been furious with herself for it ever since.

Archie Taylor was marching up and down the walk before the house. "I've got some new pants!" he cried, fearful lest she should not see their glories. "And mamma did not make these. They comed from the store."

Miss Sanford made proper outcry on their beauties, and asked for his mother. Archie did not know where she was, and, feeling that he had excited all the admiration possible in this

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quarter, he went back to his marchings up and down the path, in wait for the next comer.

Miss Sanford explored the place for her hostess, and at last, guided by Mrs. Taylor's gay laugh, came upon her in a shed, painting a buggy, aided seriously by Duncan Armistead, enveloped in a big check apron. Loose ends of Mrs. Taylor's fair hair were in her eyes and one long strand hung over her shoulder. A dash of green paint began under the near eye, crossed the nose, and faded away in a smooch under the off ear. Armistead's appearance was even worse. At a cursory glance he seemed to have skipped fewer spots on his apron than on the buggy side.

Mrs. Taylor wiped her hands ruefully on a piece of newspaper. "You mustn't come in here," she said, laughing. "I am charmed to see you, but Mr. Armistead spatters so. You know each other, don't you? I was obliged to paint this buggy, and Mr. Armistead said if there was one thing he would rather be than a lawyer in Baltimore it was a buggy-painter in Virginia. The wheels are done. Perhaps you are tired by now, Mr. Armistead?"

"On the contrary, I am just getting my second wind," he protested. "Watch the paint fly!" And he bent again to his task with the energy he put into everything.

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"Virginia has, indeed, lost a noble buggy-painter in you," Miss Sanford said, moving slightly nearer him in spite of the danger to her immaculate riding-skirt. "Could nothing induce you to embrace it?" She looked after Mrs. Taylor, who had gone to the other end of the shed to renew her supply of paint.

Armistead flushed without answering.

"I must see about dinner," Mrs. Taylor said, coming back with a full can of paint. "You'll stay, of course, Virginia? And Mr. Armistead is positively hollow-cheeked with hunger. He isn't used to manual labor. City men think they get exercise enough catching street-cars. I expect a day spent as Hugh Carrington spends his would about kill him."

"That's not fair, Miss Bessie," Armistead argued. "Have I given any sign of faltering in my work this morning? Show me a carriage in all the South redder and greener, done by any of your Hugh Carringtons."

He defended himself with almost ludicrous earnestness, and Miss Sanford began to wonder if, after all, St. Clair might not be a smaller factor in Mrs. Taylor's life than she had imagined. Armistead was not one to dally when he had set out to do anything. And he had the strength which commends itself to women as

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well as to men. That he intended winning Mrs. Taylor if he could, Miss Sanford felt certain.

Soon after luncheon, Virginia Sanford escaped from Mrs. Taylor and her buggy-painting lover. She knew the duties of a third, when two is company; and, moreover, after satisfying her curiosity in regard to Armistead's attentions to her hostess, she found his polite indifference to her rather boring. She was not used to it from chance men, not having had much experience with some one else's lover. The day was much cooler than the one before, so that riding was not unpleasant. A half-mile from Redfields cottage St. Clair overtook her. She welcomed him, and the prospect of agreeable escort home, with joy. Her high ideals did not obtrude themselves into every-day life unpleasantly. Perhaps their possession was a comfort to her. They were in the nature of an oracle to be consulted when the necessity became strongly apparent, as it sometimes did. She was nothing of a prig, and often did the things she should have left undone and which did not at all harmonize with her ideals. Principles are rather stiff formulas for exact guidance in one's pleasures, and she was very pleasure-loving. Sometimes the ideals were in danger of oblivion.

St. Clair suited her mood this afternoon. She

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felt flippant. Her moral ideals could take a nap. Another set gave him welcome; he filled them. If he had a weight on his mind or some little devils pulling at his heart-strings, he had the art or the good manners to conceal it. The lift of his broad hat, the very act of reining in his cantering horse beside her, were not expressions of general politeness; they had a personal flavor, as if for her alone.

"How glad I am to see you!" she said, holding out her hand. "I have had such a stupid day."

"There are still hours left before sundown," St. Clair answered; "and afterwards still more hours. Time enough for anything—to forget even the stupid day. My poor services are at your command."

"How will you go to work to make me forget it?"

"Alas, how!" he exclaimed, smiling.

"Good people are so slow," she sighed. "If you had had a stupid day, what should you do to forget it?"

"I was just on my way to court forgetfulness."

Miss Sanford grew suspicious; her moral ideals woke with a start. "It is, perhaps, as well to leave me in ignorance of your direction," she said, with a touch of prudery.

St. Clair appeared to ponder the question.

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"But you couldn't have been in ignorance long. I was on my way to you."

"Too bad that the direction suggests such great possibilities for you and such slight ones for me."

"Ain't it the truth?" St. Clair said, in the idiom of the country; and they both laughed.

"Are you coming to the Carringtons' house-party at Deer Hill next week?" she demanded, presently.

"Would that I could."

"That means you won't. Why not? It can't be a good reason like Mrs. Taylor's—she has to wait to see to the fall work on her farm."

"Ah!" St. Clair said, and gave no further evidence that the news might affect his movements. "But I should be in the way. The people are all paired off like the tourists in the ark. I forget who was invited for me, but she isn't going, anyway."

"Remarkable freak of memory—to know she isn't going, and yet not to know who she is!"

"It *is* a curious phenomenon. The truth is, when I am with you I forget—other things. It has been growing on me—becoming daily more serious. Now is the time to take myself in hand. It might become—er—er—"

"Fatal?"

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"No—folly, in its last stages."

"Be generous to science. Let's see what it will come to."

"All right. The malady has all the pleasures of a waking dream. But you must take the consequences."

"How does it affect me?"

"That will be interesting to learn, too."

"Then you are coming to Deer Hill? I want a right-hand-up promise. No reservations."

"I really ought not," St. Clair said. "My brother-in-law, you know, is on his way over, and may arrive any time. Don't press me too hard for reasons."

"Stuff! Your brother-in-law is coming to the Carringtons'. You are wriggling out, and I so wanted you to come."

St. Clair had an idea that this desire was about ten minutes old, but if she was willing to put a little glamour into life he was not the man to disappoint her, though the figure of Gault rose up accusingly in his mind. St. Clair invented excuses while they rode, and afterwards as they sat beneath the trees at Highwood—excuses whimsical, irrelevant, and far-fetched—and Miss Sanford amused herself spurring his invention.

"Which of all these thousand excuses is the

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real one?" she asked, finally, as he seemed to be flagging.

"'Old har' gwine through the brier patch—don't know which brier scratched him,'" he quoted.

The sunlight was going, and the tree-toads were beginning to discuss matters of interest. Miss Sanford was half sitting, half lying in a hammock, with St. Clair stretched out on the grass at her feet. He sat up suddenly, and said, in a voice expressing only seriousness, "No, Miss Virginia, I fear that I should monopolize you if I went to Deer Hill. I must give some of the other men a chance."

"You fear, perhaps, that you have the fatal fascination we read about in books? It is to avoid becoming the only man in the world to me?" she asked, mockingly. "Possibly you are the only one to some woman already?"

"Who knows?" he deprecated. "Only I don't know who she is. Would that I could be, even if the idea lasted in her mind for only a moment."

"But think what we should have to infer, Mr. St. Clair. Her ignorance would be—"

"Crass!"

"Her blindness—"

"Oh, she would be stone blind, of course. Dear

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little, unsophisticated goddess! I love her already." He stretched out his arms.

"She may be as big as a house."

"Did I say small? What matters her size?"

"Anyway, it is very rude to make love to another woman in my presence. I will leave you to your pudgy dryad—and see if supper is ready."

"I can't stay," he said, springing up. "I really can't."

"But you promised; you said there were hours to sundown, and more hours afterwards. And I was beginning to forget the stupid day."

St. Clair yielded, as he usually did to the wishes of a pretty woman. To him the day had been not at all stupid, and if he sometimes thought of Gault with compunction, his conscience excused him on account of the sacrifice he had made in regard to Mrs. Taylor.

After the matter-of-fact realities of the supper-table, a return to quasi sentimentalism was rather difficult to accomplish at once, even by such an old hand as St. Clair.

"I infer from what your father said at supper that he is thinking of buying sister Fair's place down the river," he said. "What does he want with it?"

"I think the truth is that he has the old Virginian land hunger, although he has various

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specious reasons. He says that every man ought to have a farm to fall back on if stocks slump, railroads are wrecked, and health fails. He says he is buying it for me, instead of having me learn type-writing or nursing. But he already has this place, so that that reason is pretty poor. Then again he says that land in this section of the country is bound to increase in value for summer homes of city people, and that a fine old place like that of General Tazewell's will be sure to double in value in ten years."

"Have you begun taking lessons in farming yet, against the time when you shall be trying to make your bread out of the soil?"

"Not yet; though who can tell what may happen? I don't suppose Mrs. Taylor ever expected to be thrown on the world to make her living."

"I should not think the necessity need endure much longer. My experience is that the longest lane has—er—gates leading out of it into good fields. Why stick to the road?"

"One may prefer the road to the first gate leading nowhere."

"Armistead isn't the first, and the gate he opens leads somewhere. I should think she would be right tired of the lane by now. No woman is fitted for farming—she can't look after

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things closely enough. I suppose it is partly skirts. At all events, for Miss Bessie to enter this opened gate seems to me a probable event."

"I should think it improbable."

St. Clair leaned forward, his elbow on his knee and his chin in his hand, staring into the darkness. "You mean," he asked, at length, "on account of what you thought you saw the other night?"

"Yes."

"I shall have to disabuse your mind of that illusion. Armistead was behind me at the time you watched her. You know I had quite a talk with her after you and I came back from the lawn, and her eyes kept straying Armisteadward with the most unflattering persistence." It was a straightforward invention. Had Virginia watched Mrs. Taylor and St. Clair a shade less closely she might have believed him. As it was, she felt admiration for his loyalty, which permitted the lie to be so well told, even at the expense of his vanity. "So all my tinsel heroism of renunciation was awakened to no purpose," he continued.

"It may serve you with another woman."

"Possibly, though I am no great believer in a man's winning a woman because he deserves her; he wins her generally because he hangs around.

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However, it doesn't keep me from feeling pretty sore over the absurdity of mock heroics you inspired in me. You got me at a disadvantage and spread-eagled me properly."

"I am very sorry, Mr. St. Clair." She allowed him her hand a moment, and under the vibration of his fingers the moral ideals suffered temporary eclipse, and she permitted it to go out of her keeping longer than mere friendliness warranted. For St. Clair had no intention of relinquishing it until an effort to withdraw it was seconded by an evidently real intention.

After all, she was not thinking of marrying St. Clair, and a little of the glamour which flirtation lends could do no harm; and Trueman had been very disagreeable of late. It might even—she smiled at the thought—help the situation between St. Clair and Mrs. Taylor.

"You make such a charming picture in the starlight. I like you better in this mood. There is some charity in your look for such a poor devil as I. I forget the sternly accusing judge. Don't move, please."

"I am not sure that this is not the more agreeable rôle."

"Then be it; don't play it."

"What are you doing but playing?" she asked, disengaging her hand.

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He leaned towards her. "Do you want me to stop playing it?" he asked.

A thrill of fascination passed over her. She tried to pull herself together. "After all, it's a good game," she said, lightly—"with an opponent like you, who knows the rules."

"But are *you* playing quite fair?"

Her moral ideals awoke. It was high time. "I am not playing a game," she said, more to still them than to answer St. Clair.

"Then what are you doing?" St. Clair asked.

"I—I don't know."

"St. Clair is an eminently presentable man, isn't he?" Colonel Sanford said, as his daughter came into the library.

"Yes," Virginia assented.

"Caught it from his titled sister, I reckon. I met her once in Washington, in General Tazewell's lifetime. She said very little and looked supercilious, but she had an air, a carriage—and she mowed down the men. Too bad St. Clair, with all his advantages of manner, should be no more than a professional beau, for that seems to be his reputation. I wonder he doesn't seek wider fields. There would seem to be natural limits here. No more girls, after a while, to go daft over him. And

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yet he talks sensibly and appears to have brains."

"Oh, he has brains enough," Virginia answered. "That's why he is so interesting."

"Isn't it rather hard on unsophisticated girls to have such a man loose?"

"No, I don't think so. He doesn't care for unsophisticated girls. I should think they were quite safe."

"It seems to be pure philandering on his part. Curious taste, isn't it? A woman who knew about him beforehand would be a fool to be taken in by him."

"Yes; and a woman of any experience could tell from his manner that he was playing at love-making. If she didn't see it, I'm not sure he wouldn't tell her."

"He is a fair example," Colonel Sanford said, leaning back in his chair, "of what a futility idleness and a little money may produce. Do you know his history?"

Virginia shook her head.

"Well, after his father's death, and before it, I reckon—in fact, all through his boyhood—they were poor to the very verge of rags. An aunt in Washington took Fairfax at the father's death; while the mother, with the two youngest children, undertook to keep a boarding-house in Rich-

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mond. They rented out the farm, and this boy went to Texas, became a cowboy, and afterwards a private in the regular cavalry. Old Tazewell, I always thought, might have bestirred himself to get him a commission, but I expect he had so many politician brethren to look out for he couldn't bother with a brother-in-law. Anyway, when the aunt died and left him a little money, he was still in the rank and file. He was a sergeant-major then, and a good one, old General Souther told me, who was his colonel. St. Clair left the army, for there was no prospect of promotion, and came back to the plantation. Too bad he's not in the army now. The Cuban war would have given him a chance. Still, if he were looking for a chance he would be likely to get it anyhow. They don't all come to men in uniform. The choice comes to stand to one's guns or to run, in every-day life as in battle. I have tried both places myself, and I found the firing-line a more conspicuous place to run from."

"Good-night, father. I'm very sleepy."

"Natural result of my eloquence. It often has that effect. You know the sleepest berth in the world is a door-keeper's in Congress. He is lulled continuously by the torrent of words below. Good-night, dear!"

XXI

THE house-party at Deer Hill was an impromptu affair, following on the Carringtons' decision to move down there for the fall and winter. Nannie had hardly ever been inside Hugh's old home. Her own place of Hill Acres was badly run down, and Hugh had felt it important to give it his personal oversight. But the Deer Hill house was in a much better state of repair and better suited to housekeeping on any except the most extended scale. On both places the water-works were of the simplest form: a spring at the foot of the hill, a negro, and three buckets, one in each hand and one on his head. A plumber would have starved to death in this community. But the Deer Hill house was smaller, its rooms lower pitched. One could live in it comfortably without spending one's entire income in the hiring of servants. Hill Acres was suited only to the conditions preceding the war, or for the present-day establishment of a millionaire. In winter it was a barn for cold, and most of the big house was shut up.

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In the old days huge fires had been kept up in all the fireplaces, the work of four mules and a corporal's guard of servants. Nowadays, with a half-grown boy to attend to the fires, it was difficult to keep the dining-room at even a moderate temperature. At night the room seemed to extend to the North Pole beyond the fireplace, and the ceiling was in the clouds—at least so it seemed to Hugh, when he would return, chilled through, and find the fire nearly out. One day during the preceding winter, when Hugh had come into the freezing dining-room and, kicking the fire, declared that he had never been so cold in his whole life, Nannie had asked him if Deer Hill were any warmer. He had answered that it was tropical by comparison to this pretentious barn of twenty bedrooms; and that instant Nannie had resolved to spend her next winter at Deer Hill, "to see if she could keep warm for once in her life between Christmas and Easter."

Virginia Sanford went down with Nannie Carington to help her open the house. The start had the look of an expedition; for Hugh was sending down a lot of mules for the fall work, and utilized them—with the help of two extra wagons borrowed from Henry—to move at once everything that was to be carried down.

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Hugh suggested the utilization of two mules as safe motive power for the carriage.

"No, thank you, *suh*!" Nannie answered. "I go to dances behind mules because as soon as Hugh gets a horse decently broken he sells it, and can't trust the colts to stand; but I'm going to draw the line somewhere. If I didn't, he'd put off my funeral till the mules were through ploughing and could be used for the hearse."

Miss Sanford laughed. "What's your objection to mules, Nannie? I rather like them."

"It's mainly the precedent. Next time it would be a steer team."

Mr. Henry escorted the carriage part way down the river, Hugh being detained at the last minute, and promising to come as soon as he could. None of the other guests were to arrive for several days, and during this time Nannie and Virginia, with a number of extra servants, were busy. The position of demonstrator in scrubbing and sweeping to thoroughly heedless servants was a novel experience to the latter, but she entered into it with unbounded enthusiasm.

On the night of the third day, their work completed, they were sitting on the lawn in the moonlight. Both were in the thinnest of muslins. The day was one of those hot days that some-

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times come in the fall, and would have been almost unendurable had they had time to think about it. With the help of palm-leaf fans they were trying to persuade themselves that the night air was appreciably cooler than the day. Three-quarters of a mile away, on the next hill, was the dark mass of a terraced garden, and above it a large house, the old home of St. Clair's sister Fairfax, when she was General Tazewell's wife.

"Why, she is your aunt, isn't she?" Virginia exclaimed. They had been idly talking of her.

"Yes, by marriage, and how I did hate her!"

"Hated her, Nannie?"

"And I didn't know her very well, either. Sometimes she was awfully nice to you, and then again she was insufferably patronizing."

"And you know her present husband, too, don't you?"

"Oh yes, a heap better than I did her. He had no airs. He was just nice—that is the only way I can describe him: very clean, simple, unpretending, and jolly—and good-looking."

"Mr. St. Clair is like his sister, isn't he?"

"He looks like her, but he hasn't an atom of her high-and-mightiness. That runs in the girls. Harriet is just the same way."

"I should hate to have to trust him."

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"I shouldn't," Nannie said, promptly. "I don't know that I should want him for a very intimate friend; but if I were in trouble, and Hugh were not there, I should send straight for Saint. He would be a pretty poor kind of husband, though, I reckon," she went on, thoughtfully. "He might get tired of you and prefer somebody else. But what can you expect? He has been so run after by silly girls. He can't marry them all, and if they want him to make love to them it's the least he can do. Women are so foolish about him. I have known several girls visiting here who have thrown themselves at his head."

"He doesn't kiss and tell, does he?"

"No, indeed, he always pretends to be inconsolable."

"Isn't Bessie Taylor in love with him?"

"Who told you so?" Nannie said, in a non-committal voice.

"He goes there a lot."

"He goes everywhere. He half lives at friends' houses, and they are glad to have him. Bessie Taylor is a thousand times too good for him—or for that pasty-faced city man, Armistead, even if he is a Virginian. I hate those city men, with their weight all near their belt, and every one in the same kind of hat. They all seem made after

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one pattern. But I shouldn't like to see Bessie married to Saint, either. He's too trifling. But, then, so was Hugh. Can you believe it, Virginia, that man, getting up every morning at four o'clock—unearthly hour—riding all day and half his nights over these three plantations, and working harder and more hours than any negro he hires, was once the idlest, no-'countest white man that ever— Why, Hugh!"

Hugh put his arms around her and kissed her.

"You good boy, Hugh, to come so soon," Nannie said.

"I just had to. When I know you are on the place I can stay away from you all day with hardly a thought; but directly you go away I can't keep my mind on anything. Nothing seems worth while any more, and I trail along after you. Have they begun ploughing the big bottom yet?"

Nannie laughed at the abrupt transition from sentiment to farming. "Hugh, I have one favor to ask of you," she said. "You have worked hard ever since we were married. Take a vacation for a month and be specially nice to me."

"All right," Hugh answered. "I promise. Where's the boy?"

"In bed, of course."

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"I must have a look at him," and he went into the house.

"That's the worst of husbands," Nannie said, a little petulantly. "And Hugh is a very good one." After a little pause, from an association of ideas that was not hard to surmise, she said: "You and Trueman Gault knew each other in New York, didn't you?"

"Yes. Wasn't it strange the way he happened to come down here?"

"Yes," Nannie answered, absently. She was thinking of the manner of his inheriting Redfields. "But that is the way we Virginians do things."

"How do you mean?" Virginia asked, puzzled.

"Why, not doing the things to-day that we can put off till to-morrow. But I never knew it to make so much difference before. Of course, we're all of us mighty fond of Mr. Gault," she added, quickly.

Virginia Sanford saw that Nannie was referring to something about which she herself knew nothing. "Please tell me all about it," she said. And Nannie Carrington, never suspecting that she was giving the girl her first intimation of the whole affair, told her of the matter of the unsigned wills, as it was generally understood in the country-side. As Virginia listened she turned white

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with anger at her lover. Then he had known of this from the beginning; had purposely hidden it from her; had callously and light-heartedly accepted the results of this oversight on his uncle's part, with never a thought for the one who was to have inherited Redfields—and had dared upbraid her for flirting with St. Clair. For a long time she sat in the darkness feeding her anger with little incidents that flowed to her mind—instances where Trueman had exulted in the new life he was leading; casual references to Mrs. Taylor, that now surged up as evidences of heartlessness; pictures, too, of Bessie, tranquilly pursuing her way amid the restrictions of her life, with not the slightest bitterness towards Gault.

If she had a contempt for the manner of life of St. Clair, it now seemed noble compared to the ignoble part that Gault appeared to be playing.

Let the psychologists, if they will, analyze Virginia's anger, and decide what part reproach of self, for her flirtation with St. Clair, played in this arraignment of her lover.

The days passed, and the guests came one by one, but neither St. Clair nor Gault had come.

"I wonder where Saint is?" Nannie said to Mr. Henry.

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"I've heard that question asked so many times in my life," Henry answered.

"Well, Bessie Taylor is coming Thursday. I heard from her to-day."

"I suppose that means Saint will come along, too?" Henry inquired.

"Or that he won't come at all," Nannie replied. "When Armistead went away, did he drop a hint as to whether he might be a subject for congratulations, or not?"

"We might make our congratulations to Miss Bessie, leaving the name of the person blank—to be filled in afterwards as she sees fit," chuckled Henry.

Where was St. Clair? Broadly speaking, he was, as usual, not in place. Specifically, he was at the White Sulphur Springs. He had casually come upon two acquaintances, New-Yorkers, whose father had a place ten miles up the river from his, whence the family made excursions in various directions; and since they were just going for a week at the "White," and urged him to go, too, he decided without an instant's hesitation to do so. Mrs. Carrington's house-party would last throughout the month, and his brother-in-law, the Earl of Chiswick, would go there rather than to St. Clair's house—or, if he did come, St.

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George St. Clair, his brother, was at home and could look out for him. After all, no one at Deer Hill would care particularly whether he came or not, unless it was Miss Sanford, and he made a virtue of staying away from her on Gault's account—especially since it agreed with his desire for a week at the "White."

A polite note from Gault to Mrs. Carrington mollified her anger against him, but she grew daily more furious at St. Clair's unexplained absence. The week had been remarkable for its heat. During the day no one ventured out; the delicious air at night, however, was some compensation. It was then they took long drives behind the colts or the despised mules to distant dances, or held their own court on the lawn.

Hugh, at his wife's instance, took upon himself the duty of looking out for Virginia. She was fond of riding, and this simplified matters. She had got up early one morning to go riding with him—that is, she called it early: he had been up two hours—and walked out to the stable for her horse and her escort. Hugh was sitting on the fence smoking, and near by stood a hatless man, pipe in mouth. Both were watching some colts being led back and forth by negro boys. The cut of the breeches, the straight boot-leg, and an indescribable something beyond the

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clothes told her that the stranger was an Englishman.

Carrington turned around and saw Virginia. "Good-morning!" he cried. "I have picked up a raw recruit for you to teach to ride, Miss Virginia. Let me present Mr. Maude. He has another name, but I can't pronounce it properly, so this will have to do."

Maude laughed and bowed. "You're such an ass, Carrington," he said.

Miss Sanford found that he had little to say, though he was perfectly unaffected, frank, and easy to entertain. Indeed, the Earl of Chiswick was a great deal more democratic than Carrington or St. Clair.

"Hullo, Maude!" Hugh exclaimed, as the three were riding off; "that colt of yours has got an extra polish on. And the white saddle-cloth! And look at the bright bits and stirrups. I bet you cleaned them yourself."

"Who else?" Maude answered. "You don't think I found them clean, do you?"

"Let me tell you a story, Miss Virginia, if you don't mind one little swear-word," Hugh said.

"Oh, bother the story!" Maude exclaimed.

"I must hear it, Mr. Carrington," Miss Sanford said. "I can shut my ears when you come to the swear-word."

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"Carrington's stories are so fishy, you know," Maude protested. "It's some lie about me, I'll give odds."

"You just come in incidental-like," Carrington said, grinning. "We put up once on a horse-buying trip at a little country hotel, and next morning, when I went out, Maude was at the stable with his coat off, stropping his horse with great science. Mine host was leaning on the fence, with yesterday's spatters of whitewash on his face.

"'You ain' no F'ginian,' he says to Maude.

"'No,' says Maude.

"'English?'

"'Yes,' says Maude; 'how d' you know?'

"'Oh, I knew you wan't no F'ginian, anyway; but if you was a F'ginian you wouldn't be out here befoh breakfast groomin' yo' horse; you'd be hangin' out the window an' yellin', 'Whar's that damn boy?'''"

"That's nearer like it than most of your tales," Maude admitted. "Do you mind a little gallop, Miss Sanford?"

She had an opportunity to admire Maude's horsemanship, of which the county boasted so loudly, as he galloped a little ahead of her.

"The gap is down into the next field, Miss Virginia," Hugh called. "Come this way."

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Maude had also marked the gap, and he, too, avoided jumping the fence, much to Miss Sanford's surprise. St. Clair would have jumped it anyway.

As the sun rose higher it began to hint at a scorching day, and they reluctantly turned for home.

"I avoid unnecessary jumps on principle," Maude said, as they came slowly along the fence towards the gap; "but that is such a tempting post-and-rail, and I haven't been on a gee for weeks."

"I'm going to try it myself," Carrington said.

"It's one way to kill yourself, to jump an unschooled horse in cold blood," Maude said, shrugging his shoulders.

"Here goes!" and Carrington slammed his horse at the fence.

The horse came to the fence at a gallop, and stopped short. Carrington pushed himself back into the saddle and tried again. Another stiff refusal. He dismounted and picked up a stray shingle and put him at it once more, seconding spur-thrusts with the shingle. The horse stopped; bang came the shingle on his rump; he rose, hung for a moment on the cracking rails, and came down in a heap on the other side.

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Maude leaned forward, with a muttered apology to Miss Sanford, and took her crop, and put his horse firmly, but collectedly, at the fence. He did not risk a fall by rushing it. With hands low and wide apart, to prevent his horse's swerving, and a quick blow of the crop two strides from the fence, he swung over with a good bit to spare.

Carrington was already on his feet as Maude came over. He was a little shaken, though not hurt.

"You must have thought you were riding a mule," Maude said, "to expect to buck over a four-foot fence."

Miss Sanford galloped around through the gap. As she came up, Maude rode towards her with a rueful air, swinging a piece of her bric-à-brac crop. "I am so sorry," he said.

"It's nothing at all," she answered. "I will keep it to remember this morning by. I'm so glad you're not killed, Mr. Carrington."

"Oh, he used to come off regularly," Maude said. "I've seen him and his horse come over a gate so mixed up you couldn't tell which was on top. The only difference between Carrington and my wife's brother is that Saint always seems to me to be riding for a fall, and Carrington only now and then. Neither of them has a bit of

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sense about what a horse can do or when he can do it."

"I've seen the Earl o' Chestnut, as Mandy calls him, come off, too," Carrington said, imperturbably; "and once over a fence not two feet high."

"Right!" Maude answered, cheerfully.

XXII

LATE that night, as Virginia Sanford lay on her bed, drawn close to the open window, she heard a horse come up the road. The rider went by the house towards the stable. Not long afterwards a man in a broad slouch hat crossed the lawn before the house. He was singing softly:

“Drink to me only with thine eyes.”

She leaned up on her elbow and watched him as he made his way to the brick office in the yard, where Henry and Jim Carrington were staying. She heard him knock and a voice welcome him, “Hullo, Saint!” She wondered if Trueman would come, too, and fell asleep.

St. Clair was not particularly attentive to her during the next day. After supper the company split up into various groups. The largest group centred about Maude; but most of the young girls were supremely indifferent to the presence of a peer of Great Britain. He was married: what good was he to them?

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As Miss Sanford had expected, St. Clair claimed her. He had found a guitar, and carried her off to a seat near some shrubbery, tinkling it as he walked along, with the melody of his last night's song:

"Drink to me only with thine eyes."

"Is that your only tune?" Virginia asked.

"I used to sing 'Drink, puppy, drink,' and the rest of it, 'as we pass the bottle round.' This is a better temperance song. Before and after taking, you see."

"I am not to believe what that implies, am I?"

"You may believe what you like," he said, with no hint of rudeness in his voice.

"And if I should like to believe it?"

"You may."

"Really?"

"Really."

"I am so glad."

"Oh, it wasn't so hard as I anticipated." Settling himself at her feet, he bent over the guitar and sang the old ballad again.

"You might not find other things so hard, either, Mr. St. Clair. What should you like to do, if all paths were open to you?"

"In this life to enjoy pleasurable sensations and avoid painful ones," he said, lightly.

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"Not a very lofty ambition."

"I don't know. What is yours?"

Virginia did not answer at once. Hesitating, she said, at last: "To live up to my ideals. I would wish to live so that at the end I could look back and not be ashamed of the use to which I had put my life."

"If you had misused it, the retrospect would be decidedly painful, wouldn't it?"

"Yes."

"Our ambitions may not be so very far apart, after all. I don't mean by happiness mere selfish pleasures. Our standards aren't so different: the difference is in the frequency with which we are guided by them."

Virginia was silent, accusing herself contritely of forgetting her ideals quite as much as St. Clair, whom she censured so easily. He thrummed the guitar so softly that it was no interruption when she spoke:

"I meant worldly ambitions. I didn't mean the question the way you understood it."

"Oh! I have none. Nature left every kind of genius out of me, so I have nothing to exploit."

"But work? One must work to live."

"A good aunt so arranged matters that I can live without."

"If you had some one dependent on you?"

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"I haven't; so why suppose? I have enough for myself—nearly. I can make the rest farming, if I want it badly enough. I have no desire to lay aside money. It might produce another me, and I don't think he'd thank me. I'm not very grateful for the pleasure of being here myself."

"But if you had some object in life?"

"Would an object prevent me from being sick to death with loneliness often? That's why I go around so much, to fill my mind, to be doing something."

"Were you lonely in the army?"

"Lonely! It was the acme of loneliness. Associated with a lot of men, at the best, of another class; at the worst, vicious, with no thought beyond filling their skins with liquor; to obey every boy in shoulder-straps. Lonely!"

"But conditions don't make loneliness altogether."

"Oh no: it's a type of mind. Some persons haven't capacity for a quart; others could hold an ocean."

Virginia thought she was learning to know an underlying part of St. Clair's character, hidden from the casual eye, one which explained his acts and his apparent vagaries. And St. Clair's emotion was real enough for the time.

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He was no *poseur*, though not unskilful in exploiting his mood to the best advantage. He was quite conscious how effective he was; he knew the moves of the game; there was nothing artless about him. Some men have a talent for thus artistically coining their heart's blood into ducats that pass good in the commerce of sentiment. St. Clair's pity of self evoked pity in the girl he confided in. So pathetically dreary was the world to him it would have been a hardened girl who would not try to ameliorate it with her sympathy.

"After all, it doesn't matter," he continued. "We are all tolerably alone in this world. Our lives don't touch each others' much."

"But they do sometimes."

"If I thought so, I'd draw mine away from contact with other people's. I sit at your feet here to-night, yet how does my life touch yours? In no way. You tolerate me because I amuse you. I grant you I am not very amusing at this minute. You totally disapprove of my life and of me. We have certain little superficial tastes in common, but in the big things we are worlds apart. Ours is a chance acquaintance. Simply from a worldly point of view any real—er—friendship is impossible between us. Of course, down here in Virginia, among ourselves, riches

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don't count for much; but I know well enough your point of view is not that of Virginia. You may safely amuse yourself with me, without fear of your life touching mine."

"I am not so sure," Miss Sanford said.

"Your thorough disapproval of me hedges you around like armor."

"How do you know I disapprove of you?"

"I am a mind-reader." He leaned farther over his guitar and seemed absorbed in it.

"Why do you permit my disapproval? Why don't you do something? I might like you better." After a pause, during which the vision of St. Clair conventionalized into a city business man came to her with distinct loss of charm, she added, "Or I might not."

He laughed. "No, I couldn't change it if I wanted to. And I rather thrive on disapproval. Every one in the county shies a rock at me from time to time. And I have earned most of them; though if I were quite as black as I am painted, I shouldn't be here at your feet to-night."

"Where should you be?" she asked, with a little jealous pang.

"And I am quite happy. However far apart we really are, for the moment I am near you, and your dress brushes my sleeve. In the dark, I can stretch out my hand—and you are there."

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"And if I stretch out my hand—am I sure?"

St. Clair took her hand and kissed it. "Happiness," he said, "lies very much in the imagination. Think of me for the moment as in every way what you would have me. The trees and shrubs, the distant lights, the perfect softness of the air, make everything ideal. Can't you make yourself think of it *all* as perfect?"

"It might not be. You might be everything I should wish—and not care for me."

"You would not have to waste much imagination on that."

"There are too many imaginary things. It isn't real enough."

"Does this help the imagination?" He kissed her hand again.

"Don't!" she said, snatching it away.

"I did not mean to offend. I drop still another peg in your estimation."

"My disapproval doesn't matter any more. Who am I to disapprove?"

"I have touched your hand with my lips twice. A subject may do that to his queen. Count me a subject."

His dispassionate sophistry soothed her self-reproach. St. Clair had the tact to end the interview now. "Come," he said, "the others have all gone in, and if we stay out any longer

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you will be calling me more names." One of the beauties of St. Clair's love-making was that he never hurried matters prematurely. This had been known to cause some fallaciously to consider him "safe."

The lawn seemed very rough to Virginia Sanford as she crossed it with him. Once, but for a steadying hand from him, she would have tripped. "Good - night," she said, when they reached the house. She went immediately to her room and sat down, resting her arms on the window-sill, her chin in her hands.

"You fool, Virginia Sanford!" she apostrophized herself. "It would have served you right if—" She stopped and ruminated. A minute later she spoke again. "I wonder why he didn't—" Again she did not finish the sentence.

Sitting there in her room it would have been a humiliating memory had St. Clair kissed her, engaged as she was to another man. Yet out under the trees she had half expected that he would try to. Was she half disappointed that he had not?

She got up and confronted her dim figure in the mirror. "He mustn't 'drink to you only with his eyes' any more. He's too dangerous for a little girl like you to play with."

Jim Carrington and Henry had gone to bed in

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the brick office, but they had left the lamp burning for St. Clair. He lighted his pipe, blew out the lamp, and settled down in an arm-chair by the open window, his feet in another chair and his arm on the ledge, to think.

The situation was different from any before in his career. He had always avoided a flirtation with a non-society woman or a young girl—avoided playing with one not able to take care of herself. Until to-night he had without reservation classed Miss Sanford, with her poise and experience in society, as of those eminently well able to take care of themselves. He had intended no more than an exchange of the ordinary amenities of a well-ordered and superficial flirtation; but this had now arrived at—something else. Just what was the puzzle which he worked out this night in various ways, but always with some dissatisfaction. The major premise was guess-work. Curiously, his estimate of his own worth did not enter into the question at all, as it had in the case of Mrs. Taylor; and, even more strangely, the decision he finally arrived at, presupposing the conditions the same in both cases, was entirely different:—if Mrs. Taylor were in love with him, he would stay away from her; if Miss Sanford were in love with him, he would marry her.

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He arose from his chair just before sunrise, dismissed the subject from his thoughts, yawned several times as he undressed, went to the window to hazard a guess as to what the weather would be on the coming day, and fell asleep the instant he was in bed.

XXIII

THERE was to be a dance at Eastover Court House the following night. Among your true lovers of dancing—and Virginians are that—this was sufficient to hallow the day. There was the usual discussion of partners for the german, of the merits of different dancers; the usual ante-dance fluttering when the younger girls were assembled together, as to the fate that awaited them that night. "I'm *sure* I sha'n't have any partners," one voice came through the drawing-room window to Hugh and St. Clair and Henry, smoking under the trees outside. "And I don't know *anybody*," came another. "*You* needn't talk, with Jim Carrington rushing you to death; but *nobody* will dance with me," another young feminine voice wailed. "I was never so scared before," chorussed several. "I *know* I sha'n't do a thing but hold up the wall," piped up another. In a following pause, Miss Sanford's voice said, "You are none of you as badly off as I am, for I have turned my ankle."

"H'm!" St. Clair thought to himself, "I won-

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der if that is a prelude to anything." He was to have taken her to the dance.

In the afternoon, Nannie came to him and asked him if he would not be her cousin Sue's partner, since Miss Sanford had said her ankle was so bad she could not go. "Poor Sue is terribly mortified. I don't see how she happens to be without an engagement for the german; she is generally so popular. I suppose all the men thought she had one already." Nannie knew St. Clair so well she had no hesitancy in asking this of him. St. Clair agreed, good-humoredly, as he could not very well help doing, but resolved to get out of it, if he possibly could. He mistrusted the genuineness of Miss Sanford's injured ankle, and covertly watched her limp.

Late in the afternoon a teamster of Mrs. Taylor's, bringing a trunk, stopped his one-mule wagon in front of the house. Miss Sanford was crossing in front of the mule when the animal started in fright at the noise of the unloading; for a corn-field negro can handle trunks with a disregard for contents equal to that of the professional baggage-smasher. Miss Sanford jumped from under the nose of the mule with an agility that seemed to St. Clair in strong contrast with her halting steps of a moment before.

When Nannie Carrington had read the letter

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which accompanied the trunk, she cried out, joyfully: "Oh, Bessie Taylor is coming to-night. She will be at the dance, if—"

"Nannie!" called Hugh's voice from inside the house.

"Coming!" she called back, and ran into the house.

St. Clair guessed at the rest of the sentence: "—if Armistead could bring her," or something like that, not knowing that Armistead had returned to Baltimore. He was more than ever resolved not to go to the dance if he could avoid it, and put off asking Sue to go with him as long as he decently could, hoping that some one else would ask her before him.

Just before supper, Nannie came to him in some embarrassment and told him that Sue Carington had promised to dance the german with a neighbor who had called during the afternoon.

"Then you didn't tell her?" St. Clair asked, with gentle reproach. "Never mind, I don't blame her for preferring a boy to a gray head like mine."

"I hadn't noticed any gray hairs," Nan said. "I hope wrinkles may follow."

"Horrors! Why?"

"Weight for age and previous performances," Nan answered. "You should be heavily handi-

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capped. It isn't fair for the young ones. Am I not horsy? I have been listening to your brother-in-law all day."

St. Clair's buckboard led the procession of carriages setting off for the dance. He was driving in it alone. Miss Sanford waved to them from the steps. A half-mile out he got out to mend a broken trace. The other dance-goers jeered and cheered as they drove by. Carrington offered help, but St. Clair said he thought he could find a piece of baling-wire if he hunted along the fence. "You probably will here," Hugh grinned. "This farm belongs to Jones." The presence of baling-wire—that very present help in time of trouble—indicates the farmer who sells cheap in the fall and buys back again dear in the spring. It is not uncommon in Eastover County.

St. Clair waited until the carriages were out of sight, and took a leather string out of his pocket and, through holes already punched in the broken ends of the trace, mended it. He turned and drove slowly back to Deer Hill. At the gate he got out and untied the string, and two others in different parts of the harness, until it appeared quite a wreck, and leisurely led his horse to the rack.

"Looks like I'm having all kinds of trouble

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to-day," he said to Miss Sanford, who came out, hearing wheels. "Lose you, then I lose Miss Sue, who's promised to console me, and now my ancestral harness has given out in every joint. Nim!" he called out to the stable-boy, "see if you can find me another harness."

"There ain' none. They's usin' 'em all," Nim answered.

"Well, I can pin my coat-tails up and ride. Saddle Roanoke and tie him to the rack."

St. Clair found his guitar and led the way to where they had sat the night before. Virginia was unsuspecting until Roanoke had been standing saddled at the rack for some time.

"Your horse is ready," she said.

"Oh, there's no hurry," he answered.

"Mr. St. Clair," she said, rising, "don't you intend to go to the dance?"

"You've guessed it," he answered, calmly. "It was mighty threadbare; but a poor excuse is better than none—and it served. What did I care for the dance when I found you were not going? And why did you send word to me through Miss Nan, instead of telling me yourself? Why wouldn't you go?"

"My foot—"

"And my harness," he interrupted.

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"Do you mean to insinuate that I stayed at home for—for—"

"Not 'for—for—.' And why, Miss Virginia? I don't bite."

For an instant she contemplated running to the house and to her room: she was convinced that it was the part of wisdom to fly. But she sat down again, and asked, with a kind of desperate exasperation: "Why did you come back, Mr. St. Clair?"

"I have never really gone."

"But the others—what will they think?"

"That I came back. They saw me break down. They need no better witnesses than their eyes."

"Please go," she said.

He played softly for a few minutes on the guitar.

"You heard me."

"Are you considering what 'they' will think? Because you needn't."

"Why not?"

"The dance has hardly begun. There are still hours in which I can show up. Besides, you know very well I came to Deer Hill because you were here."

There was evasion in her answer: "If you are going to stay, you may as well sing to me."

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St. Clair took up his guitar. "What shall it be?"

"Some of Moore's Irish melodies. I like them best of anything you sing."

St. Clair sang "Believe me, if all those endearing young charms," and as he sang his mind was not on the girl at his side. He finished it, and after a minute, in his sympathetic voice, began "Love's Young Dream."

"It is so unreal, so impossible, the idea of the song, you know," Virginia said.

"I believe," he said, slowly and thoughtfully, "that I entirely disagree with you."

"But love is not the only thing," she argued.

"No; it is not the only thing. To some people, even, it is nothing. I have known women who had no conception of love beyond the practical realities of a good marriage. They made good wives, too, in a way. It's all a matter of taste—but think of the taste! Every one can't marry for love, of course; but not to know that it is really the only thing—" He spread his hands with a gesture signifying the incomprehensibility of the idea.

"The proportion of mercenary women is not greater than that of men."

"I suppose not, only I have known more of the women. Thank Heaven, now, a pretty face in

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a soulless woman is no longer dangerous to my peace of mind."

"Perhaps every pretty, soulless woman is not so anxious to disturb your peace of mind as you imagine." The intonation added to the insult of the words.

He reached for the guitar and softly strummed some minor chords without replying to her.

"Please—" she entreated, after a minute.

"I am going right away," he said, politely misunderstanding her. "Shall I see you to the house first?" He stood up, his face inexpressive.

"I was not going to say go. I was going to say forgive me."

"It is not important," he answered, smiling. "We can dispense with minor apologies."

"But I can't."

"Oh, of course, then." He stood still, waiting.

Miss Sanford rose to her feet. She was breathing quickly. This was the end; she realized that. She blushed hotly as she recalled words of hers that seemed to her now like almost unmaidenly advances. Yet she knew that in very few respects was St. Clair her ideal of what a man should be; though, standing before her, tall and dark in the starlight, she thought him, for the moment, the most attractive man she had ever known.

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She stood, waiting for him to speak, to say something to change the tensity of the situation. He did nothing, standing quite still. She took a step nearer him. At the motion he turned towards the house, accepting it as the sign for going in. Tears came into Virginia's eyes. She turned towards him, but it was too dark for him to see them; besides, he was looking straight before him. She tried to speak. Before the words came she stumbled, and again he did not notice it. Then she drew herself up, and walked firmly on. Her cheeks burned and the tears dried in her eyes.

At the foot of the steps she stopped. She dismissed him with a gracious nod. "Good-night. Now go to the dance. It was kind of you not to let me spend all the evening alone. You needn't help me up the steps. My foot is quite well." With another proud inclination of the head, she walked up alone.

XXIV

ST. CLAIR rode away from the Deer Hill horse-rack with a lightness of heart for which he did not even try to find a cause. He did not, with his usual carefulness, pin up the tails of his dress-coat. He did not ride slowly and try to keep his trousers away from the sweaty shoulders of his horse. Instinctive politeness prevented his hastening till he reached the end of the lane; but then he dug his heels into his horse's sides and went off at a wild gallop, Roanoke, with the perfect sympathy of the well-bred, well-trained horse, entering into St. Clair's spirit, as if to him, too, had come the joy of a great discovery.

Gone were St. Clair's doubts, gone his calculations, gone his indecision, gone even his scruples about another. He was following his desires, not his conscience nor his reason; and the world was worth while, life filled with happiness. He had thought he could do this or do that. He had thought this best, that most worldly-wise. He found there was one thing in the world for

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him. Philosopher and altruist were lost, and the man spurred on. He stood up in his stirrups and shouted and halloed as if in sight of the quarry, while beneath him Roanoke, the reins on his neck, flattened down and ran till he changed the still night air into a whistling gale. A rolling stone would have meant death to man and horse, but neither recked it while living was of the best.

Half-way up a long hill the instinct of the horseman came to St. Clair in his mad mood, and he pulled Roanoke down to a walk—a quick walk, head outstretched, his flanks black with sweat, and little rivulets running down his neck, while long breaths recovered his wind against another outburst, and the continual pricking back of one ear or the other awaited the signal.

At the top of the hill a rapidly driven buckboard stopped. "Hallo, Saint, was that you burning the ground?" Gault's voice called. "Must be in a hurry."

"I am. But where did you come from?"

"From the hall. I drove straight there from Redfields. I wrote Miss Nan, Tuesday, I'd be down to-day, but she never got my note. I couldn't start till late, so I didn't go to Deer Hill first." He gathered up his reins. "The drive kind of used me up; it was awfully hot—must have got a touch of sun—so I came away early."

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For the rest of the way to Eastover, St. Clair rode at a walk. He sang little snatches of song, broken off in the middle, generally, by pure bubbling over of good spirits. He was as eager as ever to arrive at his destination, and yet felt a desire to prolong the pleasures of his present mood. He hardly thought consciously. He planned nothing for the future, indulged in no retrospect of the past; yet luxuriated in an ecstasy of happiness that ignored past and future, defied the powers of fate, and laughed at destiny.

Mrs. Taylor was sitting on the porch of the dancing-hall, and alone. It was a miracle; but miracles were like commonplaces to St. Clair that night. Two men rushed towards her as he came up; and it seemed entirely natural that they should come just after him and not just before. Mrs. Taylor was sitting at the end of the bench. When St. Clair sat down beside her, there was nothing for the two men to do except to stand; hence they drifted away after a few minutes, during which St. Clair sat tight. He let one of them bring her a glass of water without stirring. He only sat and looked at her, and wondered that he had ever imagined he could think of any other woman—had ever believed it within the bounds of possibility for him to marry another.

"You came very late to the dance. Hugh

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said you had broken down. You ought not to have broken down—to-night. Did you know I was coming?"

St. Clair leaned a little nearer her. "Yes, I knew you were coming. But I thought, first, you were coming with Armistead—and that you would marry him and live happily ever afterwards. And I did not want to have to step forward and say 'I do!' when they asked 'If any man know just cause why—'"

"And how did you find out that Mr. Armistead wasn't coming with me?"

"I didn't find out. He just vanished away into thin air, and you were left all alone. And I felt so sorry for you, all alone, that I galloped and galloped, until—until—I slowed down to a walk."

They both laughed at the lame ending. The atmosphere was electrical, and their laughter was the result of their feelings, not of their words.

Mrs. Taylor felt an intangible difference in his voice and manner towards her — a difference which made her at times catch her breath—a difference which for her, too, changed the world and all. St. Clair had never made love to her; he had cared for her too much to do so before. Perhaps his years of practice had not been wasted.

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"I knew you were coming to-night," Mrs. Taylor said, softly, at a pause between them, "although you haven't been to see me for *years*. Why have you stayed away so long?"

"I was staying away—for you."

"And to-night?—aren't you thinking of me to-night?"

"To-night? To-night I can't think."

The tuning of a violin inside heralded the approach of more dancing.

"Come out and sit in one of the carriages," St. Clair said, hastily, fearing lest some one would come up and ask Mrs. Taylor to dance.

They went out and took possession of a surrey whose guardian negro boy was raptly looking through a rear window of the hall at the dancers.

For several minutes they sat in silence, St. Clair watching the sweet face of the girl at his side, its natural purity rendered almost ethereal by the starlight. A terrible fear came over him that, after all, he might lose her—lose her now when he knew that not all the world beside could compensate for her loss.

His voice vibrated when he spoke to her, hardly daring to disturb her thoughts: "Now that I am with you, in some way Armistead doesn't seem thin air any more. He is reincar-

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nated. He seems very real, just now, and very formidable. Please don't let him be real!"

Bessie Taylor turned towards him. A happy little laugh, that was hardly more than a sigh, came from her lips. "He isn't really real," she answered.

"And won't you let any one else be real, for ever and ever, amen?" he pleaded.

They were looking into each other's eyes.

"No," she said, slowly, "nobody but you."

XXV

WHEN Trueman met St. Clair riding madly to Eastover, he himself was on his way to find Virginia Sanford. He had expected her to be at the dance; and not finding her, had pleaded the fatigue of his long drive from Redfields as an excuse for going on to Deer Hill. Excuses are accepted at their face value in Virginia, especially in matters of the inclination of the affections, and his desertion had been accepted as of course.

He had decided to tell Virginia the whole situation in regard to his ownership of Redfields, and do as she bade him in the matter. Poor Trueman! he could not have come at a more inauspicious time. Virginia's mind was hardened against him, and hardened more from her own transgressions than through his. She was bitterly angry with herself for having encouraged St. Clair, for having flirted with him; bitterer yet that at the end it should have been he who withdrew first. For while she had no intention of falling in love with St. Clair, while she did not think him the man to hold her love, even if his charm might be

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able to win it, nevertheless she realized that he believed he could have had her for the asking.

The pretty flames had hardly scorched her. They inspired anger, not fear, anger not commensurate with the offence. The human heart has been curiously complicated by the quality of self-control grafted on primitive man's desire. It is that which gives to edged tools their charm as playthings; but when they cut us we have learned that it is childish and unsatisfactory to beat them with a stone. The harmless Xerxesian plan of whipping the offending sea is no longer for us. We generally whip, to be sure, but no insensate body of water—some shrinking body of a fellow-being instead. That is one of the reasons why marriage is not a failure: because it supplies, always ready to hand, one thus to relieve us of our suffering.

The ways of love are not simple, and the ways of those things that are not love, which precede and follow and flank love, are stranger. Virginia Sanford generally had a strong sense of justice. It did not help Trueman to-night. There was punishment going a-begging, and it fell on him.

At the sound of wheels she had come down out of curiosity. Her greeting was cool. Had she expected him she might have been less so. The

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traveller who counts on surprising is often surprised himself at the inopportuneness of his arrival. The mind attuned often gives a more cordial welcome to a mere acquaintance than the mind surprised gives to a friend.

Some novelists would have it that man and woman can love only once. Others have admitted the possibility—particularly where the heart has been bruised by unworthiness—of a second *grand passion*. One eminent English author is more unorthodox still in his views; while a prominent present-day American author has maintained in private—he has never dared write his monstrous views in his books—that a man is only ripe for the best love after a number of experiences—a number so scandalously large that this page shall not be sullied with its mention. But even this author has not dared say that a girl may be in love with two men at once. It is true that the perennial subscriber to household magazines devoted to literature, pickle-receipts, and most intimate advice, often reads the letter of some poor questioner whose two suitors find equal favor in her eyes. But to such a questioner the answer is invariably given—by those who act as sign-posts to the straight and narrow way of loving—that this is not true love. However

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this may be, Virginia had undoubtedly been fascinated by one man, for a short time, while loving another; though her love for Trueman might last and grow, after the fascination of the other had evaporated utterly. The love of Trueman and Virginia had flowed too smoothly; and love is hardly proved true till it boils around boulders. Most lovers manage to make their hard times through misunderstandings, if no roughnesses come otherwise. Not even this had come to these two before.

But while their lives and their loves had appeared monotonous in the pleasure of living, Gault had been growing in many ways. His nature was still rather immature. One side of his character had been developed by his newspaper work in New York; but newspaper work is the public school of life, it is not the university. For another side of him, Virginia, the State, was doing as much; while Virginia, the girl, might do more for him than either. The faith in mankind, which the reporter loses more than either the lawyer or doctor, and almost as much as the policeman, was coming back to him here in the country. He had not been in the newspaper business long enough to have reached that stage of arrested development which would have overtaken him later. Instead of looking always for

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the lower motive, Trueman was now beginning to look for the higher. His reportorial cynicism was only skin deep and easily sloughed off in the wholesome, interesting life he now led.

Trueman and Virginia went out and sat where she and St. Clair had sat a short time before. She managed to evade, rather than repulse, the lover's salutation. It hurt him, but seemed of a piece with the whole world as it had now become.

"I want to tell you something about myself that is very important," Trueman began.

Virginia did not interrupt him all the time he was telling her of the way Redfields had come to him, and of what he had learned since. He did not specify just when he had learned about Mrs. Taylor's claims, and there was no doubt in Virginia's mind that he had known of it all along and was trying to hide the fact.

"How did you learn that I had found out about it?" she asked, coldly, when he had finished.

"You — found out about it?" he repeated, staring.

"Yes; that is why you have told me, isn't it?"

"You thought—you thought that I shouldn't have told you otherwise?"

"It seems simple enough."

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Trueman rose to his feet. "In that case I don't know that we need discuss it any further."

"Oh, very well." She, too, stood up.

He half relented from his attitude of severity. "I thought," he faltered, "that you—that it concerned—"

"I could have married a poor man—not a dishonorable one."

She gave her sentence with the serene omniscience of youth deciding right and wrong, and walked on towards the house. Over her shoulder she called "Good-night!" in a tone of impersonal politeness that hurt more than anything else she could have done.

Gault walked slowly into the hall and wrote a short note to Carrington, asking him to pardon his abrupt departure. Then he went out and groped about in the dim stable and found his mare, by the aid of matches lighted and then carefully extinguished. The harness had been thrown into his buckboard by the boy who had unhitched her. Gault put her between the shafts and drove away.

XXVI

THERE was no announcement of the engagement between Bessie Taylor and St. Clair. Virginians are too wise to take the world into their confidence in these matters. Too many cups have slipped for the lip to be ready with rash words. But a noticeable change had come over St. Clair, which more than one ascribed to its right cause. A restlessness had underlain all his life, even when most lazily lived. He was hardly more attentive, now, to Bessie Taylor than to any other girl in the house, and certainly was not so gallant in word and action to her as to the others, yet content had come upon him, and this content was centred in her.

The dance at Eastover, which Gault had deserted to find small comfort in Virginia Sanford, was the culmination of the Deer Hill house-party. The Sanfords went away two days afterwards for a fortnight in New York, many of the men had to return to their homes to look after the fall work, and Hugh himself found less and less time to give to his guests during the day, and in the

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evening bore himself with a sleepiness which his most heroic efforts could not disguise.

It was surmised that Miss Sanford was the cause of Trueman's sudden arrival and departure, and nothing was said of it. Back at Redfields, Gault was throwing himself into the work of the farm with a concentration of energy which the overseer resented, taking it as a reflection on himself. Barney was a conscientious man and did his best, but old plough-points will be left in the field instead of being carried to the scrap-heap, and the roll of binder-twine will be left under a shock when the hands come in from pulling off corn; and an overseer has a right to a little aggrievement if he has a master who notices trifles like these. The twine would have been found in the morning when they began the day's work, and the plough-points were a small loss at best.

Trueman's face lost its smooth outline; the cheek-bones showed more plainly, and his ruddiness was turning to leathery tan beneath his constant work, and the square shape of his jaw became plainer. He took back into his own hands the ringing of the plantation bell in the morning, which had been relegated to the overseer; and often he was restlessly prowling about the place in the dark an hour before it was even time to

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ring the bell. Only by the hardest and most constant work during the day could he make himself tired enough to sleep at night. Notice was sent him that the fox-hunts were being held regularly twice a week. He replied with a liberal contribution towards the expenses of the pack, but did not go to the meets, pleading extensive improvements in fencing and ditching on his place as necessitating his presence at home, when Terry and some of the others dropped in and protested at his reformed habits. Gault's popularity had sensibly declined in the last few months. Social relations are peculiarly reactive. The world smiles back at you when you smile at it, and it scowls right heartily when you scowl. There are few so necessary to it that it cannot do well without them. Your egotistical recluse, who says with Schopenhauer that men are dolts and he will have none of them, is permitted to stay secluded by the dolts with disconcerting equanimity.

A man living the ascetic, introspective life Trueman was now leading could find no satisfaction in ordinary things. The religion of the Middle Ages rightly placed the flagellation of the flesh in a high place, for it induced a state of mind demanding extraordinary outlets. Peter the Hermit and his kind worked their souls up by

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working their bodies down. Your well-fed, well-amused, sound-sleeping man is notoriously satisfied with his soul *in statu quo*. He sees no visions—the nightmares of the overfed lead to nothing, not even to abstinence)—finds no missions, and performs no feats. This is fortunate for the world, or Cook's tours would all be crusades.

Trueman woke up in the morning with the thought of no enjoyment to come to him during the day. He looked over the broad fields in which he once had taken so much pride, and they were a desert to his eyes. His horses were no longer his friends. He was curt with his hands and with the overseer. They were machines to be worked as hard as possible; and he felt they were shirking if they did not show the feverish energy that was burning him up. They were no longer the kindly human beings with whose co-operation he was living such a pleasant life. He was suspicious of men, cruel to horses. No matter what the day, he would strike Tanis across the rump and urge her savagely along the road till she reeked with sweat, and the sight of her distress was nothing to him.

He felt that he should never enjoy Redfields again; yet a certain obstinacy in his nature made him cling to his inheritance under adverse criticism, where sympathy could have induced him

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to do almost anything. It was the old fable of the wind and the sun again. The thought that he was a thief in the eyes of Virginia Sanford—perhaps even in the eyes of the world—grew upon him. Every casual nod of an acquaintance that he fancied cold, every surly reply of a tired negro, worked on his moral nature and filled him with suspicion as to their thoughts towards him.

When he heard of the Sanfords' return from New York it seemed to bring his seething emotions to a focus. With a sudden resolution he sat down at his desk and briefly and in untechnical language wrote a deed making over to Mrs. Taylor half of all the property that had come to him from his uncle. His intention was to get Henry to make the deed properly as soon as he saw him. He drew a breath of relief when it was signed. He had a feeling that he had escaped both the devil and the sea, and wondered that he had not done this long before. There was still left plenty for him; he would have done a noble and generous act in the eyes of his friends; he could hardly help being applauded even by Virginia Sanford herself.

And yet, with one of those reactions that were often coming over Trueman now, he soon lost this rosy view of things. After all, it was not his

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sense of justice, his honor, that was impelling him to make restitution, he told himself, morbidly. It was his love of a girl and her contempt of his course; and he was only makeshifting—compromising with the devil. If Mrs. Taylor was entitled to half the estate, then she was entitled to the whole, with the exception of the bequest to himself; and perhaps not even that was his, since in the latest holograph will his name was entirely omitted.

These thoughts, however, only partially dampened his feeling of relief at this solution of the tragedy. With the rough deed in his pocket he mounted Tanis and rode over to Highwood.

Virginia held out her hand to him with a cordial commonplaceness of manner with which she would have greeted an ordinary acquaintance. This manner can be more cruel to a lover than the severest resentment or the strongest expression of pique. It removes him at once from any especial footing and places him in the ruck.

"It is like home to be back here," she said. "And my friends seem so glad to see me. All this cordiality to a person they didn't know a year ago may not really mean very much, but it is pleasant."

"Yes, pleasantness is the keynote of life down here, when one is in the mood for it." He could

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not enter into her happy unconcern of manner. The superficial pleasantnesses had meant too little to him the last few months.

"How the leaves have turned, and how the autumn has come on since we were at Deer Hill!" she went on. "Mr. St. Clair was here this morning, and we took a ride down the river road to see the woods on the other side. He was the first person to come to see me."

If there was a bit of reproach in the last sentence, Trueman did not notice it for the pang of jealousy that shot through him at the mention of St. Clair.

"I have come to tell you," he said, abruptly, "that I have made over half Redfields to Mrs. Taylor."

Virginia flushed. The sequence of thought was obvious, and roused her quick anger. It was not meant offensively, but Gault was so full of the subject he disregarded everything else. Climaxes in life should be led up to as they are in the play, otherwise they come with tactless suddenness; and tact is a good lubricator—it keeps the wheels from creaking.

Gault took the deed from his pocket and handed it to her. She read it slowly, and gave it back to him.

Virginia was complex beneath her simple, out-

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door-loving manner, and the search for exact motives in what she said next to her lover might entangle us in a mass of contradictions.

"This ought to win you the applause of your friends," she smiled. "It's a very pretty grandstand play. Of course, Bessie Taylor won't take it from you any more than I should."

Gault stood numb. His eyes fell from her glance, as if, in truth, he had been moved by the pretence her words imputed to him. His defences were razed. He walked slowly to the door. There he stopped, and Virginia, relenting, waited for him to speak, repenting her ungraciousness, her lack of sympathy, her unfairness — hating herself for them, wishing to "make up," yet seemingly powerless to make the first advance.

Gault stood still, brooding. An idea had come to him of immolation, and, writhing beneath her words, he seized it as if it meant salvation.

He looked up at Virginia. "By God! she shall take it all from me!" he said, and went out of the door.

Gault was not in a pretty frame of mind, and the recording angel probably did not put many merit marks opposite his name. He walked out to his mare, tied to the fence, and stood beside her, as in a trance, looking down at the ground.

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At last he started to mount. The negro cook, coming up on the other side of the fence, caused Tanis to shy away from him as he was putting his foot in the stirrup, and for the only time in his life Gault cursed a woman. Then Tanis, impatient from the cold, would not stand—she whose high spirits he had loved—and he jerked her so cruelly on the curb that she reared straight up. When he was in the saddle he brought down his whangee stick with all his force across her nose, the tenderest spot in a horse. In an access of fury he plunged his spurs into her sides again and again. But the virulence of his rage took away the satisfaction of it; for the mare simply stood and endured it, as man or beast must when things go too far.

After his paroxysm of rage he felt weak and spent and deadly repentant, and rode along quietly.

XXVII

LONG into the night, Gault sat before the fire in his room, thinking over the plan that had come to him under the stinging impetus of Miss Sanford's words. It was the way to give back Redfields to Mrs. Taylor; a hard way, but the only one, if she would not accept it from him as a gift, a moral restitution. Without argument he had accepted as true Miss Sanford's words: "Bessie Taylor wouldn't take it from you any more than I would."

Far into the night he ruminated, testing his plan from every point to see if it would fail him. He could find no flaw. While yet the cold November night gave no hint of dawn, in its clear, starlit depths, Gault went out to the stable, saddled and bridled Tanis, and started towards Eastover. She trotted sharply off, and for mile after mile he kept up the same gait along the level river road. His feet, against the steel stirrups, became cold and cramped, and his hands numb from holding the reins. He dismounted and walked for a mile, his arm slipped through

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the reins and his hands in his pockets, the mare with lowered head walking in long, overreaching strides behind him. The intense black background of the stars began to lighten, and the stars to lose their secure footing in the sky. Gault mounted, Tanis raised her head, and at a quick trot he rode on into Eastover, to the hotel.

He ordered breakfast, and rode on to the livery-stable and made sure that Tanis was properly fed and rubbed down. After his own meal was over he went to the telegraph-office and sent a message to Kearns requiring his professional services, with an urgency of language that he felt certain would bring him on at once, if it were possible. "Bring all necessary paraphernalia for executing a delicate piece of work," the message ended.

Gault could have sent his telegram from the little railroad station at Cartersbrook, but he wanted to avoid the possibility of any of his neighbors learning about it.

From the Western Union office he strolled up the dirty little street of Eastover Court House, gazing into the windows of the shops with an absorption a plantation negro might have shown in his half-yearly visit to town. The street had once, during the boom of some ten years before, proudly macadamized itself. The impulse to a

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pavement, however, had died with the boom, and the street had never again been resurfaced. Occasionally, when the earth's crust broke through, a cartful of nigger-heads or of brick-bats had been dumped into the abyss, and in the fierce struggle for existence the larger and harder rocks endured, and thrust their heads above their less fit brethren. The residents of Eastover Court House, and of Eastover County in general, bumped over these rocks and did not approve of macadamized roads; but Gault looked at it, as at the other salient features of the town, with a melancholy affection. Even the defects of our friends become dear to us when we are to lose them.

Towards the middle of the forenoon, Gault got his mare and rode at a walk out to Hugh Carrington's at Deer Hill. Kearns would not arrive before the second day at shortest, and Gault could not bear the idea of dwelling alone with his thoughts and regrets for two days.

A convention of gray-headed, active women, representing some Daughters or other, was in possession of Deer Hill for the day. They were exploring the historic homes along the James, and swarmed about with note-book and pencil. Gault retreated precipitately and found Hugh in the middle of a fifty-acre timothy field on the

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island, the ploughs just beginning the fallow for the next year's corn.

"Did you go by the house?" Hugh asked, with a grin.

"Oh yes; met the leaders of the expedition, too. Miss Nan said she was so glad I'd come, because I could help her entertain them; but I sneaked out the first time her back was turned."

"I was afraid they'd be making comparisons between me and my lace-sleeved, silver-buckled ancestors. I have no desire to appear in print as degenerated from them. Luncheon's going to be sent out to me; they'll be gone by night. Stay with us for a day or two, can't you?"

Gault accepted the invitation thankfully. As he rode home from the island with Carrington, at the end of the day, the plough-mules swinging in a long line behind them, he was thinking how to Carrington his being there was a chance visit—to him his last look at the life he loved and was about to lose.

A negro sitting sideways on a mule behind them began to sing, and the others joined in the wailing chorus. It was something about "being over Jordan—after a while." The melancholy tune more than the words expressed the longing that seems to belong to every subject race; and

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the "After a while" was all the chorus, but all the pathos, the sorrow, the resignation of their lives they managed to put into the words. It made Gault bite his lips to keep them from trembling. Carrington was unmoved. He had heard them sing it all his life. Gault, too, had heard it at Redfields; but to-night the application of the song to his own case put something into the words he had never felt before. Night was at hand; to-morrow, and then another night, and then all he would have left was the vague "After a while" of the negro.

He was going to do something honest beyond the world's standard. He was giving up all that he had, under no compulsion, because morally it was not his. If the consciousness of virtue would only bring him peace—if the world would only not look so black.

While Hugh attended to the many little things that come at the end of the day, Trueman sat on the fence watching the mules file towards the brick stable. He watched, as if he were at the theatre, the playful shove of the animals, the hunched-up quarters in threatened kicks, and the nips at each other's flanks, as they crowded through the door. Across the yard, a tall negro, silhouetted against the lemon sky that promised wind for the morning, stood on the fence, and

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his cry rang across the hills: "Hawg! h-a-w-g! c-h-e-o-g!"

The sun was gone, the day's work was over, and Carrington joined him, pulling up his coat-collar, for the night air was keen. Gault shivered. He had forgotten that he was cold, as he had sat there, seeing the familiar things, hearing the familiar sounds.

Around the fire in the dining-room, Gault accepted with almost humble thankfulness the ordinary friendliness of Hugh and his wife. There were playful recriminations between them on the subject of the visitation of Daughters, who had come to taste and severely to test the hospitality of the river country.

"No, sir; don't catch me playing host to them," Hugh protested to his wife. "Ate up a dozen hams, I suppose, and will write in some paper that 'the bounteousness and plenty of the antebellum days are now over, alas!' They always are 'alassing' us."

"They only ate four hams, Hugh," Nannie protested, a little shocked at his inhospitable tone.

The homelike feeling of it all came over Gault strongly as they busied themselves with the heaped-up platter of black walnuts, into whose cracked mass they dove for the meaty treasures

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after supper was over. The outer world, the world of the city, seemed inexpressibly dreary to his mind, and he regretted that Hugh's early habits cut short the long hours of the evening. He went to bed, but the unaccustomed room was not calculated to allay the sleeplessness which had been growing on him the last few months. He got up, dragged a blanket from the bed, and sat down by the window, leaning his face against the pane and looking out into the night. The young moon was setting in the west, while the stars overhead were emboldened to shine brighter by her coming departure. The silence of the country inwrapped everything. The ends of the logs on the fire dropped into the corners of the fireplace, and the fire went out.

Trueman had a sense of religion the stronger for never being a subject for his conversation. This night, when he went back to his bed, he sank down on his knees. "Dear Father in heaven," he prayed, "help me now—help me to do the square thing! It is all I ask." He stayed on his knees for a long time. "And help me a little, too," he prayed in agony; "for I need it!"

In bed he stared into the darkness for an hour. He half sat up, leaning on his elbows, trying to tire himself into drowsing. The self-pity that

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was with him at one time was gone, and he laughed savagely: "Just because I'm going to do the only decent thing—the thing any gentleman would have done long ago—I think I'm a regular martyr."

At last he lay down on his side, and then suddenly a quieting of the nerves stole over him, as if the peace of God had descended upon him in answer to his prayer. Psychologists may explain that it was only the reaction from the intense strain. Be it what it may, this ineffable calm enveloped him and he sank into deep slumber.

It was characteristic of Gault that he had not appealed to God once when he had meant to keep Redfields. His was not the nature that could seek for religious endorsement of an act he doubted himself.

With the dawn he awoke and got up. The day broke in vivid tints, and the mists along the creeks rose in clouds. The clang of the bell sounded from the overseer's house. Life had begun again in the small world. A mule brayed loudly for his corn in the stables, a quarter of a mile away. Sleepy-eyed negroes slouched along, bound stableward. A boy rode by Trueman on Hugh's horse, and tied him to the rack; and presently Hugh, muffled in an ulster, came out, and,

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seeing Gault, drew the rein of his horse over his arm and walked beside him to the passageway of the stable, where the grinding of teeth in the corn made cheerful music in the shadows inside. Everywhere were the simple sounds of a big plantation just awake.

And with the day the exaltation of sacrifice had departed. A dull ache, that seemed at times to stifle his breathing, alone remained, that and immeasurable apathy. This insensibility to all the pleasure of living, this distillation of boredom, is the hardest part of sorrow and tragedy. Trueman did not care that he was going out of his Southern life without credit and without respect. He did not care that he was going to cause himself to be misjudged and contemned, even by her he loved. He looked on everything with utter apathy.

Kearns arrived, cheerful and hungry, by the first possible train. He had got back into the city mood, and the bare brown and red fields, the windy drive over rough roads, the draughty, big rooms of Redfields, whence the modern radiator was absent, served to remind him pleasantly of all the advantages of civilization he enjoyed in his snug boarding-house in New York, where the size and location of his room earned him the

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respect of all his fellow-boarders; for Kearns had prospered.

"You won't mind if I come to business at once, will you?" Gault asked, at the conclusion of the meal that had awaited their return from the station.

"Not at all. Fact is, I couldn't very well come away from New York just now, and if your telegram hadn't been so strong I should have put you off a couple of weeks. The sooner I can get back to town the better it will suit me—meaning no disrespect to the attractions of Virginia and her black-eyed beauties."

With a slight feeling of disgust for Kearns, whose lack of breeding grated on him more than it ever had before, Gault explained to him succinctly the state of affairs in regard to the Redfields inheritance. "For certain reasons of my own I want to give the estate back to Mrs. Taylor," he ended, "and the only way to do so is to forge my uncle's name to the will he wrote himself."

Kearns stared at him. "That's what you want me to do? How about the witnesses?"

"A holograph will in Virginia does not need witnesses, so Henry told me," Gault answered.

"Let's see the will."

Gault handed him the envelope containing the

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three. Kearns studied them all carefully, paying particular attention to General Gault's handwriting. "Why don't you let the whole thing rip," he said, as he laid them down, "and send Mrs. Taylor something handsome anonymously?"

"No," Gault answered, wearily, "that won't do. You can do the job for me, can't you?"

Kearns saw that his host was fully resolved on this step, and his thoughts turned to his own advantage. "Forging isn't exactly in my line. Still I might risk it for a price. There's state-prison at the other end if things go wrong."

"They would hardly prosecute you for a piece of forgery like this. Of course, I'll pay you what the thing's worth."

They discussed terms, and it seemed to Gault that Kearns was exorbitant; but he was too tired to haggle over them, and Kearns unpacked his bag and began practising an imitation of General Gault's signature from some old letters his host gave him, and trying to match the ink of the will, which was of a curious brownish hue. Gault sat by, smoking, with somewhat the feelings of a man watching the signing of his own death-warrant.

"Don't you want me to put in that ten-thousand-dollar legacy to you that is in the other two wills?" Kearns asked, looking up from his prac-

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tising. "I can do it all right—no extra charge. I've got his writing down to a dot."

"No," Gault answered, shortly.

By supper-time, Kearns had affixed General Gault's signature to the will. "It's a neat job," he said, looking at it with satisfaction. "Now, what will you give me to burn it up?" he asked, playfully.

Gault shook his head without speaking, and they sat down to eat. In the middle of the night Gault drove Kearns to the train. Gault had telegraphed to Richmond to have the through express stop at the Cartersbrook station, and with the consideration of Southern railroads, his request had been granted. He did this less to oblige Kearns in his desire to return to New York as soon as possible than that he might spend the last few hours of his stay at Redfields alone.

Tanis, heavily blanketed, had stood at the horse-rack since dark, hitched to the buckboard. The night was blustery, though clear, and the moon had set before they left the house. Gault, wishing as little as possible said of Kearns's coming and going, had told the stable-boy to hitch up and then go to bed, saying he would himself put up his mare when he came back.

They had fifteen minutes to wait at the little station, absolutely deserted. Gault had few

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words to say: he did not seem to Kearns the man he had known with business intimacy on the *Planet*.

The headlight of the train shone far down the track, as they stood on the platform, at Tanis's side. At the increasing light of the locomotive, Kearns picked up his suit-case and held out his hand: "Well, Gault, I suppose we'll see you in New York some of these days. And I must say you've acted damn white in this matter."

Gault wrung his hand, not trusting himself to speak. The appreciation of Kearns, who had not hesitated to gouge him for forging the signature, was the only bit he had received, and it moved him more than he would have thought possible.

"I can't leave my mare. She'd run away this cold night. Good-bye!" was all he said, and they parted.

XXVIII

THE next morning, Trueman slept till nearly noon, and awoke unrefreshed. He had hardly any feeling now except fatigue. The conflict of the last few months had completely worn him out. He rode over to Henry's farm, but did not find him in. He asked for paper and ink and wrote him a short note:

"MY DEAR HENRY,—By the will which I leave with this, you will see that all my uncle's property goes to Mrs. Taylor. Being entirely in his handwriting, it requires no witnesses, I believe, by the laws of Virginia. I cannot make restitution of the money of Mrs. Taylor's I have spent, because I haven't kept an account, and haven't it. But I think you will find Redfields in as good shape as when I took it.

"TRUEMAN GAULT."

Then Gault rode home and prepared for his journey to New York that afternoon.

When Henry read this letter and the will, he sat puzzling over the affair a long time. "There's something about this that strikes me as not quite

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right," he said to himself. "I believe Gault was a man who would have told of this will as soon as he found it. Still, man is human, and Redfields is a goodly inheritance to give up when it is absolutely in one's possession. I wonder if any one else knew of this."

He studied the will again carefully. It undoubtedly was in old Mr. Gault's handwriting, and the signature was his, too—Kearns was an artist in his line. Henry scrutinized it closely, and it struck him that the ink of the signature seemed a little different from that of the rest of the document. "I know that ink," he said, scratching his head, doubtfully. "That's from that bottle that got frozen and always wrote brownish afterwards; but the signature looks blacker. Still, he might not have signed the will when he first wrote it."

He said nothing to any one of the will on that day, though he heard that Gault had gone away. The next he got up early and rode down to East-over Court House to the bank. He called out the cashier and showed him the last two lines of the will and the signature, and asked him whether there was any difference between the two writings.

The cashier looked at it carefully. "It's undoubtedly Mr. Gault's writing. What is it—the missing will?"

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"Never mind. I just wanted your opinion on it."

All the way home, Henry pondered over the matter, but could find nothing to justify his vague feeling that everything did not appear on the surface. Finally, he dismissed the matter from his mind. "No, there's no possible chance for fraud," he assured himself.

He rode around by Redfields cottage to tell Bessie Taylor of her good fortune. On the way, St. Clair overtook him.

"You'll give your horse the thumps if you ride him like that," Henry said, discontentedly, looking at St. Clair's radiant face, as he came down from the gallop which even in the keen November air streaked his horse with sweat.

"Trying to get him hard," St. Clair answered, good-naturedly. "He may have to go into the plough."

"Go into the plough, man!" gasped Henry. "Plough Roanoke!"

"May be tooling a plough around my place myself," St. Clair answered, cheerfully. "Rather like the idea."

"For Heaven's sake—"

"No, for Miss Bessie's sake. Haven't you noticed any difference in the universe lately?"

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Look at the sun, man! It never used to shine like that."

"Humph!" It was Henry's sole congratulation for several seconds. "Well, if telling you she was a thousand times too good for you would make you any humbler—" Henry regarded him for a long time in silence. Then a genial smile spread over his face: "Well, I suppose she can afford you now, if she wants you—people have queer tastes in pets."

St. Clair flushed, and Henry went on: "I'm going to ask you to do me one favor this afternoon. I am on my way to Miss Bessie's now. Let me go there alone. I want to make one last attempt to show you to her in your true colors."

A look of real alarm came into St. Clair's face: your true lover frights at shadows; and it only went away when Henry burst out laughing at his companion's expression. "Saint, you certainly have a bad conscience, or are mightily in love. But I really want to see Miss Bessie alone, now, on some important business. Harden Roanoke for the plough some more by running him back home. I'll tell her you will be around after supper."

"Thanks! but I believe I will sit outside on the fence and wait. I never knew you to spend a long time on business," St. Clair responded.

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He climbed on the whitewashed fence of the little house-yard and tied Roanoke beside him.

Mrs. Taylor answered Henry's knock, and, as she opened the door, caught sight of St. Clair on the fence. Her greeting to Henry was gracious but absent-minded. She came to the edge of the porch, her hand over her eyes.

"Aren't you coming in?" she called.

"I wanted to see you a moment by yourself," Henry interposed.

"Oh, all right," she answered, a faintly puzzled look on her face. She waved her hand to St. Clair, and went into the house with Henry.

St. Clair swung his legs and sang softly to himself. He was pondering on what sort of congratulations he should receive from his two sisters. They, with a providence not over-common in Virginia, had always looked forward to his doing as well for himself, when he married, as Fairfax had done, and as Harriet had every intention of doing. To St. Clair himself this had seemed a fitting end to keep in view, although when it came to the point, his attentions had always been given to those that pleased him, not to those his sisters would have had him please. He had confided his engagement to his brother-in-law, and Maude had been sympathetic, and, for an Englishman, enthusiastic. Maude was a good fellow. He

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had been to see Mrs. Taylor and had pressed them to spend the honeymoon in England, offering privately to St. Clair, with much diffidence, to provide the funds for the trip. Yes, Maude was a trump. St. Clair's thoughts ran on dreamily. He was very happy. Contentment with life possessed him. "Shall I get fat on happiness," he wondered, "or will it take another turn and make me feverishly energetic, like Hugh?"

The front door of the cottage opened and Mrs. Taylor flew across the grass towards him. Tears were running down her cheeks. "Saint!" she cried.

He jumped from the fence and rushed towards her. His face turned deadly white. Was he to lose her now?

"Bessie! What is wrong?" His arms went around her.

"The will is found. Redfields is mine—is ours! Mr. Gault brought it to Mr. Henry. He has gone back to New York." She drew back from St. Clair and looked across towards the ridge behind which Redfields was hidden.

Henry came up, leading his horse—the forgotten Henry who had brought the news.

"You went away so suddenly, Miss Bessie," he said, "that I had not time to tell you how well this good fortune would grace the brow of beauty,

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especially enhanced by the priceless possession of our neighbor's love"—he grinned a little sardonically at St. Clair. "Desirable, however, as are the magnificent and stately halls now again to be lightened by your presence, in holding one who has climbed to a lofty pinnacle in the esteem of all her friends, no less by her incomparable graces than by her unrivalled beauty, they will be outshone by the jewel they contain, and become but the setting for it, taking their lustre from her, not adding to hers."

Henry had got his adjectives well in hand, and with a bow as elaborate as his speech he took his leave.

In the evening, hand in hand, feeling almost like children stealing into a forbidden land, St. Clair and Mrs. Taylor walked over to Redfields. The east front of the massive pile of bricks stood black in the slanting rays of the western moon. They paused on the terrace and looked up at the home that was to be theirs, that had so shortly before been another's.

"Who da?" called a voice from inside the house.

"Hulloa, Uncle Billy, don't know us?" St. Clair answered.

"Mistuh Saint! I clar I didn't know you!" emerging from the house with a profound bow.

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"An' Miss Bessie! They tell me you is comin' back yuh. I suhtainly is glad. Mistuh Gault went away yestiddy. Shook hands with me, an' said he warn't comin' back no mo'. You won't find no difference. Things is just like they was." The old negro ruminated over the events of the last year, and continued: "Mistuh Gault, he come yuh an' hung up his hat, an' then he putt on his hat an' went back to the Yankees whar he come fum."

"Poor Mr. Gault!" Mrs. Taylor said, softly, "he oughtn't to have gone like that."

Vividly there came into St. Clair's mind a scene near this very spot, when Gault had told of his love for Redfields, and how he would rather die than give it up. However unweighed his words, he had not been shamming.

"Yes, poor old True!" St. Clair said.

XXIX

IN the gray of the morning the porter put aside the curtains of Gault's berth and announced, "Jersey City in ten minutes, sah."

Trueman was already awake. The early hours he had been cultivating the last year and more did not permit him to sleep late, although he had sunk into the lethargy of exhaustion early the night before and had hardly stirred since. He was not refreshed by his sleep, and awoke with the same dull ache in his heart that he had gone to bed with.

He went out into the dressing-room and listlessly washed himself. From now on he should always wash in stuffy little quarters: no more for him the wide spaces of Redfields, the massive bed and big tin wash-tub, with ever-ready negroes to bring him water from the kitchen and to tidy up after him. Here he was waited on by the porter for the quarter to come. There was no friendliness in it, and, the quarter given, he was hustled out of the car by the same negro, his

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path laid out between iron fences, his footsteps conducted by gates and uniformed things.

He took a cup of coffee in the station. He would no longer go out into the "quarter" where the farm hands were getting their breakfast and take his cup of coffee with them, his taking it an honor, the best seat always offered him, all glad to receive his morning greeting and to joke with him on simple farm things—all with the good manners that are instinctive with the well-bred darky. Here, in the station, the milk that he poured into his coffee had sediment at the bottom of the pitcher. There was no apple barrel here for him to help himself from, only fruit sold by the nickel by an Italian, rubbing the apples with a greasy rag to make them shine, and carefully setting them specked side down.

Everything, by its difference, made more poignant the ache of homesickness; reminded him of all that he was leaving forever—leaving without honor or self-satisfaction. He could not take his thought off it all. There was nothing that interested him in the movement of things about him. The piece of meat half-way to his mouth lost its savor as the thought of Virginia Sanford came to him. The day before, on the train, he had met some acquaintances, who had considered him extraordinarily dull and quiet; for to him other

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girls had become vapid, trivial, commonplace. It was a marvel to him that they could take themselves with such complacency.

He had dreaded to be alone. Yet, when he had talked to his friends he had longed to leave them. He had gone from the steam-heated cars, stuffy after the fresh air of the big Virginian rooms heated only for a small circle by the open fireplace, out on the platform, and had stayed there as long as he could, looking out over the bleak fields which to him had all the charm of a blessed land he was losing. Then he had come back into the car, until the heat and the suffocating sense of desolation drove him out again.

It had been worse at supper time. Then, he might have been going over to see her. He might have heard the impatient horse at the rack, inspired by the keen night air, pawing for his master to come out and mount him. He went out again on the platform and stood in the wind made by the moving train, his coat unbuttoned, his hat off his head. Thus the wind might be blowing for him were he on Tanis and giving her a free rein. He wondered what Virginia thought of him. If her high sense of honor, which had impelled him to all this, would ever permit a little womanly sympathy that he had hoped for, and in vain.

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Now the night was passed, and for that he was thankful; but the sordidness of the day had begun. He went on the ferry-boat with a crowd of commuters. A flood of them had debouched from an incoming local train, and swept him along with them. "One would think they were going to something really worth while," he thought to himself, looking at the pasty-faced men smartly dressed—at least to his eyes, used to the carelessness of a country where the men leave dressing, except on formal occasions, mainly to the women. Then he looked at the girls, deteriorating in their cheap finery gradually from their showy hats to their down-at-heel shoes, and then away at the jagged sky-line of the city, which he had sometime admired as picturesque, but in which he could see nothing pleasing now.

Mechanically he went up to the front end of the ferry-boat when the crowd did, as if he, too, were in a hurry to go ashore. The boat bumped gently into the guiding row of piers, slid along, and stopped. The gatemen whirled the windlasses winding up the rope which fastened the craft to the shore, and Gault listened to the clank of the ratchet growing slower and slower, as the rope tautened. It was too early to go to any newspaper office to look for work, so Gault went

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up to his old boarding-house to engage a room. His landlady was glad to see him. "Want a room?" she cried. "The best room in the house is vacant just now. I heard you came in for a fortune. You're up for a little spree, I expect. There's nothing like little old New York, after all. The country's all very nice, but nothing beats the city."

No, he told her, he wanted the cheapest room in the house. It was a mistake about the fortune. He was looking for a job, just as he was when he first came to her house.

She wheezed up three flights ahead of him and brought him to his old room. "We've had it papered since you went away. A gentleman died in here of consumption last winter, and though we might only have had it fumigated, and almost any one else would have done it, we thought we would be on the safe side and have it papered, besides."

"You didn't change the color," said Gault, grimly, thinking of his former abhorrence of the tint.

"No; we thought a nice, tasty yellow was as good as we could get."

"It seems cold," Gault said, shivering at the dampness of the room, never warmed by the sun's rays.

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"We haven't put the gas-heater in here yet. We were going to put it in before, but the gentleman who had it last week was mighty particular about what he smelled, and he said he could smell the gas, no matter how carefully we made the connections. I don't expect you'll find anything the matter with it. You haven't got one of these superfine noses, if you've been living in the country. You'll have to be a little particular, though, because the cock turns very easily, and you might leave it turned on when you didn't mean to. I think it's a leetle safer if you always leave your window open a little at the top."

The room and the landlady and the view out on the back windows opposite gave Gault almost a feeling of physical sickness. He hardly answered her loquacity, but she continued, with unabated friendliness: "Have you had your breakfast yet? You'll find some of your old friends at the table. Miss Peters married Mr. Bemis—you know him, don't you; he's a floor-walker at Jones — and they have the big, back room on the second floor. It really is cheaper than being single, because they only have one room. That makes the fourth wedding we've had here since you left. I think I'll start a matrimonial bureau," she said, jocularly. "Can't I put you

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down for some nice girl? We have lots of them, off and on. Or are you going to surprise us, some day, with one of those charming Southern ladies? She'd find herself very comfortable here, with all the trouble of house-keeping taken off her shoulders. And I expect she wouldn't mind the change from her quiet home, either."

Gault declined renewing his acquaintance with the other lodgers at breakfast, under the plea of having already eaten in the station. He escaped from the landlady to seek an expressman for his baggage, and wandered over to Union Square, and then up Broadway, and finally back down Third Avenue. He could see nothing but charwomen washing front steps, and belated baker's wagons and milk-wagons hurrying through their rounds. That fascination of the city which there is for the young man first coming to it to seek his fortune was wholly absent for Gault. He was not quite fair to the city, taking her when in curl papers, and comparing her to the country's natural locks, uncurl-papered, even if unbrushed. But he did not want to be fair to it. Everything that he cared for was in Virginia: he sought only for points of inferiority in New York, and he found them. Into the shop-windows, which daily delight the eyes of thousands, he looked with no interest. "The things in the

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country are to enjoy," he reflected; "in the city, to buy." Perhaps his having had all the money he wanted in the country had added to its pleasures more than he realized.

The day sufficiently advanced found Gault taking the elevator to the office of his old newspaper. He opened the door and was about to walk into the room that held the reporters when an officious small boy stopped him.

"If you'll write your name and business on this," he said, holding out a pad of small printed blanks, "I'll take it in to the city editor."

"Is Mr. Johnson still here?" Gault asked.

"Yes."

"Just take him in my card, will you?" He drew out his card-case, and then put it back in his pocket and wrote his name on the blank. Even cards were worth saving now.

Mr. Johnson's answer came back to him with flattering swiftness, and the officious small boy ushered him in with an unbending of his former dignity.

"Hullo, old man!" Johnson called, holding out his hand cordially as he tipped back in his chair. "Come back to revisit the haunts of your youth? Hear you're a nabob, now. Or are you going to buy the paper? Wish you would: turn it into a

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yellow fellow and raise all our salaries. We're so blooming clean that you can't put us in the ordinary person's hand for fear of soiling the paper."

Gault shook Johnson's hand with a rather dismal grin. "You've made a mistake, Mr. Johnson. I'm just where I was when I left: that is, I'm looking for a job."

"You're joking, True. Didn't you throw up your place here with the hauteur of a multimillionaire! We had a Sunday special on you three weeks after you left. Stevenson got hold of some facts about you and made a three-column yarn of it. I don't know how near the truth we got, but you know Stevenson can make one fact do for a column of rattling good stuff when he's pushed. Besides, we knew you well, and could imagine how you'd be prancing about through your tobacco-fields and among your sugar-cane. Never saw it? Well, it's evident you don't subscribe to a clipping bureau. It was copied all over the country. Had it illustrated, too. Revamped some cut of President Madison or Jefferson or Van Buren's home. Stevenson wanted to run in a picture of Lydia Pinkham as the aged maternal aunt from whom you inherited it."

At last Gault made the city editor believe that there were no glories attendant on his return to

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New York. Then there was a subtle change in Johnson's manner. He was no snob, but it is not in ordinary human nature to treat the applicant for a job—one among the many that come into every newspaper office daily—with the same cordiality with which one treats a rich Southern planter, in New York with money in plenty and perhaps a good "story" hidden about him somewhere.

The interview ended thus: "Sorry, old man, but the staff's full. We took on two new men yesterday. You might try the *Trib*. I hear they've just fired seven men, and this ought to be your chance, unless they're trying to cut down expenses."

Gault shook hands with Mr. Johnson, and went out past the office-boy. Outside the closed door he stopped, undecided where to go next. He remembered how he had stood there a year before, hesitating, as he was hesitating now; and how his first thought was of Virginia Sanford, as—he caught his breath sharply—as it was of her now. Then the world had been before him; and now—"Well, it's before me now," he said, with a short laugh, "and Heaven behind me."

XXX

ST. CLAIR and Bessie Taylor were married early in the winter, and went to Redfields to live. He was utterly regardless of the spiteful sayings which would of a certainty be made in a case like his. He accepted them as the natural output of people's mouths. He would have said similar things himself of another—said them humorously and good-naturedly, or with a bite in the words, according as he was well or ill disposed to the person—and he expected nothing better from others. In a way, he almost preferred that his neighbors should praise his thrift at the expense of his honesty. We all have our vanities.

Virginia Sanford was curious, with an almost abstract curiosity, to see how his marriage would affect herself. She knew that St. Clair, in spite of the virtue in him, which took the rare form of pleasantness, was not the kind of man she could ever have loved, beyond a mere passing fascination. And she knew equally well that he was exactly the kind of man to make Bessie happy.

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While the latter, in her gentle way, was more strait-laced than Virginia, she had the gift—not unusual in women—of seeing only the good in the men they loved, so long as they were given half a chance.

She was hardly surprised, then, although well pleased, to find St. Clair's marriage causing no regret to her. St. Clair had sometimes been accused of not wearing well. This had generally been due to a cessation of a desire to please on his part. But, however enduring his charm might be when he chose to exert it, it was undeniable that he was not one of those who wear well in absence. He had much of what is called personal magnetism; but people found themselves forgetting him, in his absence, as he forgot others—and Providence dispensed wisely in this.

It has often been said that a lover's absence may plead better for him than his most earnest prayers. This is a great comfort to your sighing swains who believe in rules about women. And while it was not true of St. Clair, it was different with Trueman. After he left Eastover County, Virginia tried to put him out of her mind entirely—and he was in it more than he had ever been before. It was more than absence, however, that pleaded for Gault. His giving up Red-

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fields, the finding of the will and all, had, of course, been the eighteen days' wonder of the neighborhood—we digest our pleasures more leisurely in the country. The comments on his conduct had varied from commendation to the darkest insinuations that he would have destroyed the will had not Henry—or Billy—or St. Clair—discovered him in the act. All these various opinions and stories only showed that Eastover County was in a healthy-minded state, and as interested in its own affairs and as imaginative as the ordinary county community.

Probably no one condemned Trueman more severely than Virginia Sanford did in her own mind when she first heard of his departure: yet in time she found herself vehemently defending him, when he was accused of having held back the will—"a sharp Yankee trick." Your half-Southerner, who lives in the North and idealizes the South through the Suwanee River and Meh Leddy, sometimes finds the other half of her ancestry waking up into strong protest when she meets some of the injustice which each side accords the other. After one or two earnest defences of Trueman by herself, she was surprised to find her attitude of mind towards him becoming the one which gradually prevailed in the neighborhood: that he had done a fine thing in giving

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up Redfields, no matter what the circumstances were.

Of those who spoke well of him in the county, Henry was the chief. Along with his good-natured friendliness towards everybody was a deep-seated cynicism, the outcome of his legal experience, which teaches one to seek the discreditable motive beneath those acts that appear the fairest.

"Do you know how many men," he said to Virginia, "would have given up Redfields: holding it absolutely, with only an unknown will that he could burn in ten seconds, in the way? About— Well, *I* should have done it, of course," he summed up, blandly. "And we will say your father would have done it, because you are his daughter. But, barring us, I really believe only St. Clair would have been fool enough—if he'd been in love with the claimant; and then he'd have married her afterwards."

The nobility of his act, the tremendous sacrifice of it—even granting he had hesitated a long time, with the will in his possession—began to impress itself on Virginia. And she began to believe, moreover, that he had not hesitated such a long time. She remembered that his moodiness had come upon him of late; that it had not been there when he first came South; had not been there when they became engaged.

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Soon after Christmas the Sanfords went abroad. The colonel's health had improved amazingly in Virginia, and his physician thought that a sea-voyage and a winter in Egypt would complete his recovery. They stayed in Europe for nearly a year, in various places recommended by their climate and their quiet. Then a great longing came over Virginia for a return to her home in New York: for its many-sided life; its stimulus; its artificiality; its American cosmopolitanism; the contact with its different minds. Some say that our civilization grinds all of us smooth alike. But it is only the weaker pebbles that are rounded beyond distinguishing from their neighbors. Some steely ones only sharpen themselves on stones: and such come together in the cities, in winter; they do not dwell solitarily in Waldens.

One day late in the winter, Virginia, sitting in a car of the Sixth Avenue elevated train, was idly letting her eyes wander from sign to sign, as they passed, with staccato effect, before her. At one of the stations, Trueman came in and sat down opposite without noticing her. And his eyes, too, with the city-tired look in them, followed the never-ending succession of signs. The glow of country living had left his face, but it had gained something. The leanness of it

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brought out the squareness of his jaw, and a resolute look had replaced the comfortably satisfied one he had worn during the first part of his stay in Virginia. Something about him, too—an air of self-reliance—told her that he was successful, and successful by his own efforts. His face had, perhaps, less of mere content in it, but it had been replaced by something more purposeful.

Virginia leaned forward and held out her hand. "True!" she said.

He had been thinking of her at the moment. He took her hand. He did not speak. What was there to say? The things he would have said to an ordinary friend would be futile with her.

"Come sit beside me, True," she went on gayly, to relieve the tension, "and tell me—everything. You look as if you were doing well." She suddenly felt a pride in him she had never felt before.

"Yes; I have had pretty good luck. Life seems better worth living since—" he hesitated—"since I found out how well worth living it could be." He looked absently out of the car window for a little time. "I did not appreciate things when I had them," he said, as if to himself.

"I thought you appreciated Redfields mighty well," she said, smiling.

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"I meant you," he said, simply.

Virginia's eyes dropped quickly.

"Playing the game is the thing, after all," he continued; "and it's nothing much to play it with our hands full of trumps. A man wants to make himself worthy of—of all that—after he has learned about it. And fighting an uphill game has a certain exhilaration that mere pleasure-coasting hasn't."

"Why haven't you been to see me? You knew I was here?" Her intonation asked the question.

"Yes."

"And you didn't want to come?"

"Yes," he answered again, slowly. "But things are different from what they used to be. How did I know—"

"They aren't different from what they were before you went South," she interrupted; "and then you used to come to see me."

"You would hardly compare me now with the man I was before I went to Virginia."

She half closed her eyes and looked at him. "I should think you compared very favorably."

Trueman paled. "In spite of the will?" he asked, recklessly.

At the words an intuition came to her, and certain words flashed into her mind—words not

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thought of for more than a year—words in which he had sworn passionately that Bessie Taylor should accept the whole of Redfields from him. How he had done this she had no inkling as yet, but the feeling that in some manner he had compassed it, prompted her next words.

"They say down in Eastover that there is something the matter with the will: that it was not made by your uncle."

Trueman turned white to his lips at the random shot, and they moved stiffly as if with cold: "It's a lie!" he said, huskily.

His eyes wavered away from hers, down the aisle of the car; then he forced them back. Untruth-telling demands the steady eye.

Virginia looked at him a few seconds longer. Then she leaned a little towards him, and the tips of her fingers were laid on his arm. "Yes, it was a lie," she nodded. "They don't think it at Eastover. I am the only one who thinks it."

The unexpected words moved Trueman as nothing had since he had given up Redfields. His eyes filled with tears, and he stared hard at the advertising cards on the side of the car and bit his lip till the blood came, to keep the unmanly tears from rolling down his cheeks. Perhaps she divined that another word from her

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would overcome him altogether; for she turned her attention obviously to the street scenes below.

When time had passed for the tears to dry unshed, she said, without turning her head: "A girl who hasn't valued a man's love in the past, and who is sorry for it—do you think she could get it again if she told him how sorry she was?"

"Don't, Virginia! But everything is so different!"

"Yes; everything is different. It would never have been different if you had stayed at Redfields."

It was a month later, and the city spring had arrived. It put forth its petals in the shop windows and in the advertisements. Men's clothes had taken on a fresher, gayer tint. It was not time yet for the straw hat to burst into flower, but the winter overcoats had fallen from their stems, or lingered only on a few elderly backs. Here and there an early open car gave promise of the multitude of its companions soon to follow its lead. On Sunday mornings the sheltered glades of Fifth and Madison avenues were gay with the hardy white spats or the bright-colored silk, first of the spring annuals. The dreary animal, man-with-a-snow-shovel, had deserted his

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winter haunts and bravely fared forth throughout the broad land in search of the rural bread-fruit. And in the squares and parks the sooty buds were bursting into green.

Virginia Sanford, coming into her drawing-room, where Gault awaited her, carried an open letter in her hand.

"It's from Bessie Taylor — Bessie St. Clair," she corrected. "They want me to come down to visit them."

"Are you going?" he asked, and it was an entreaty for her to stay.

She tilted her head on one side, considering.

"It is only a month," he pleaded, "since— I have hardly been able to realize that it is true yet."

Virginia consulted the letter again. "Bessie doesn't set the date." She moved a little nearer Trueman, with the inclination towards him that bespeaks love. "I might put her off for a while, and then—we could go together."

THE END